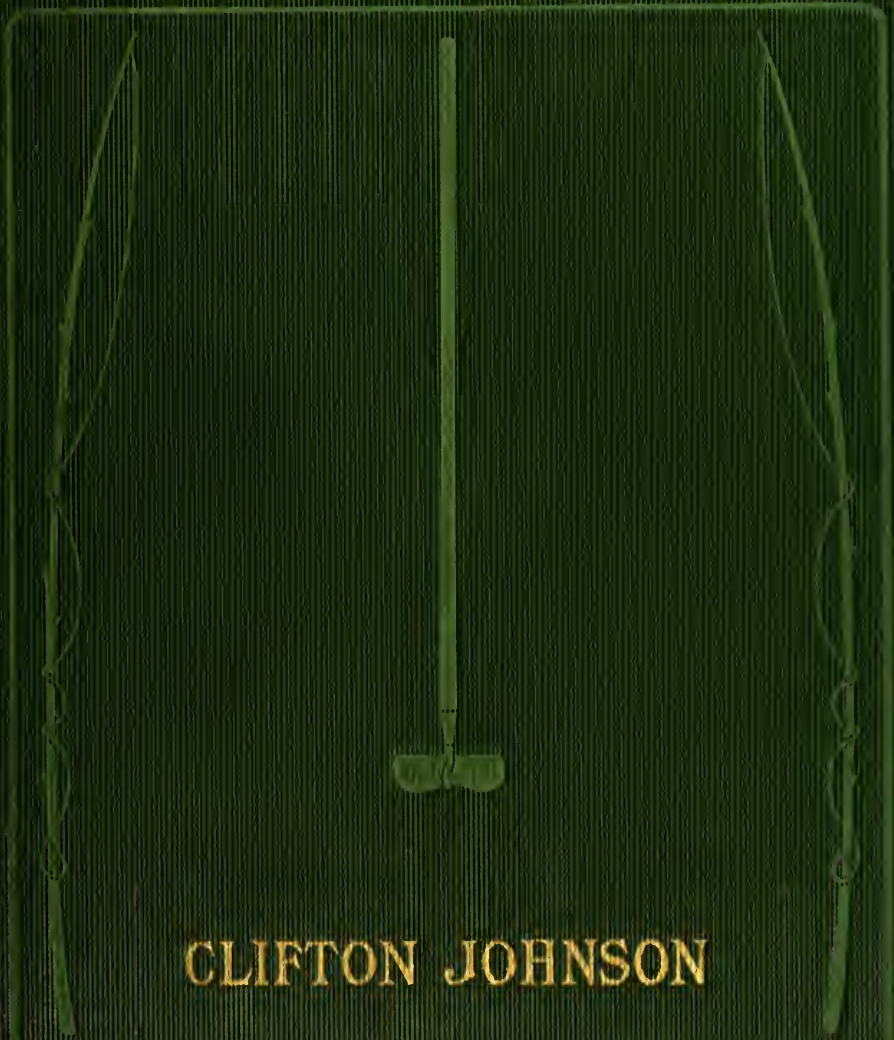
THE FARMER'S BOY



CLIFTON JOHNSON

The dusty roadway

The Farmer's Boy

by

Clifton Johnson

With Illustrations
by the Author

New York
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
Publishers

PUBLISHED, SEPTEMBER, 1907.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I SUPPOSE there is a good deal of fun in being a boy anywhere; but I shall always firmly believe that the best place in the world to enjoy life in one's youth is in the New England country. Probably all the northeastern portion of the United States has much the same charm. However, I know in my own experience what it is to be a New England boy, and if I were to live the old days over I would not want to risk venturing the least bit across the line into other parts lest I should miss some evanescent delight or other — I can hardly tell what — which I imagine New England has all to itself.

This volume shows the farm boy as I used to know him — at work and at play, in all seasons, and under such varied conditions as come into the average boy's experience. Such an experience is of course not all gayety. There are ups and downs; but even so the fact is scarcely to be regretted. We would not appreciate the sunshine if we never had clouds; and in looking back the hardships are often seen to have been fairies in disguise.

The boy is the book's chief topic; yet it will be found that the rest of the family, and, in particular, the girls, receive some share of attention, both in pictures and in text. My hope is that these pages will rouse in such readers as have had the happiness to enjoy similar experiences many pleasant recollections, and that to others the book will furnish entertainment, even if there is some regret that they did not have the fortune to be New England boys on a farm.

CLIFTON JOHNSON.

HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS.

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I

WINTER

THE varied boyhood experiences which I relate in these pages are not of the present century; yet they are sufficiently recent so that the doings, thoughts, and feelings of many youngsters now are almost exactly the same. In this back look I propose to begin with New Year's morning. The farm boy was still sleeping soundly when he heard the voice of his father calling from the foot of the stairs, "Come, Frank — time to get up!"

You may perhaps imagine that the boy leaped lightly from his bed, and that he was soon clattering merrily down the stairs to the tune of his own whistle. But the real, live boy who would fit so romantic and pretty an impression is a rarity and always has been.

Frank was so unheroic as to barely grunt out a response which should give his father to understand that he had heard him, and then he turned over and slumbered again. It was six o'clock. The first gray hints of the coming day had begun to penetrate the little chamber. The boy's

clothing lay in a heap on the floor just where he had jumped out of it the night before in his haste to escape from the frosty atmosphere to the shelter of his bed. In one corner of the room was a decrepit chair, whose cane-seat bottom had some time ago increased its original leakiness to such a degree that it had been judged unsuited to the pretensions of the sitting-room, and had been banished to the chambers. An old trunk with a cloth cover thrown over it, and a stand, above which hung a small cracked mirror, were the other most striking articles of furnishing.

The walls of the room were not papered, and where the bed stood the bedposts had bruised the plaster so that enough had fallen away to give a glimpse of the lath behind. Several pictures were pinned up here and there, and there was a large framed, legal-looking certificate which affirmed that the boy's father, by the payment of thirty dollars, had been made a life member of the Home Missionary Society.

The boy was rather proud of the fact which this certificate commemorated; for though his understanding of the document was quite vague, he felt sure that to belong to the Home Missionary Society was something very commendable and religious. He often read the certificate and deciphered the names of the distinguished officers of the society who had put their signatures at the bottom; and he liked to look at the Bible scene pictured at the top.

Moreover, he took pleasure in the elaborate frame, which consisted chiefly of little hemlock cones set in glue. He was tempted to the belief that he was blessed above most boys in having a father who was honored by being a life member of the Home Missionary Society, and who possessed such a certificate in such a frame. His logic even carried him so far that he complaisantly concluded his folks were pretty sure of going to heaven in the end — at any rate, their chances were much better than those of most of the neighbors. He was fully convinced that his father and mother were more religious than the average. Indeed, he was quite religious himself when he happened to think of it.

About as soon as he could lisp, his mother had taught him a prayer to say when he went to bed. She used, too, in those days, to sit beside his crib, after she had tucked him in, that she might hear him repeat the prayer and prompt him if he faltered. The first time he ever tried to say it alone was on an occasion when the baby was not feeling well and needed all the mother's attention. So he volunteered to go to bed alone. Off he trotted into the bedroom. His mother began to sing softly to the baby, but the bedroom door was open, and she heard him climb into his crib. Pretty soon he was saying his prayer —

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep" —

Then there was a long pause, after which he went on with these words: "Well, God, I've forgot the rest, but it's all right."

He was not in an especially religious frame of mind on the New Year's morning I have mentioned, nor was he thinking about the Home Missionary certificate. Getting-up time came while it was still too dark to make out much besides the dim shapes of the articles about the room. Even the gayly colored soap advertisement he had hung next to the missionary certificate was dull and shapeless, and the garments depending from the long row of nails in the wall at the foot of the bed could not be told apart.

The morning was very cold. The window-panes were rimed with frost, so that scarcely a spot of clear glass remained untouched, and there was a cloudy puff of vapor from among the pillows with the boy's every outgoing breath.

The boy's father, after he had properly warned his son of the approach of day, made the kitchen fire and went out to the barn to feed the horses and cows. When he returned to the house, he appeared to be astonished that Frank had not come down, though one would think he might have grown used to the boy's early morning sluggishness; for he had to combat it almost every day. He stalked to the door at the foot of the back stairs and said, in tones whose sternness seemed to prophesy dire things

if not met with prompt obedience: "Frank! don't you hear me? I called you a quarter of an hour ago. I want you to get up right off!"

"Comin'," Frank mumbled, and he rubbed his eyes and tried to muster resolution to get out into the cold.

Digging a dooryard path

"Well, it's full time that you was!" commented his father; "and you better be spry about it, too."

When you repose on a feather bed, it lets you down into its yielding mass, so that if you have enough clothes on top, you can sleep in tropical contentment. There is no chance for the frost to get in at any of the corners. Frank felt that his happiness would be complete were he allowed to doze on half the morning in his snug nest, but he knew it was hopeless aspiring to such bliss, and a few minutes later he appeared downstairs. His hair was tumbled topsy-turvy, his eyes had still a sleepy droop, and he was in his shirt-sleeves and stocking-feet. He had no fondness for freezing in his room any longer than was necessary after he was once out of bed, and he always left such garments as he could spare downstairs by the stove. Of course, he had not washed. That he would do just before breakfast, at the kitchen sink, after the out-door work was done.

The half-dressed boy, as soon as he reached the lower floor, hastened to make friends with the sitting-room stove, where a fire, with the aid of "chunks," had been kept all night. A light was burning in the kitchen, and his mother was moving about there, thawing things out and getting breakfast. The boy hugged the stove as closely as the nature of it would allow, and turned himself this way and that to let the heat penetrate thoroughly all

around. Then he put on the heavy pair of shoes he had left the night before in a comfortable place back of the stove, donned his vest and coat, pulled a cap down over his ears, and shuffled off to the barn.

The morning scrub at the sink

Frank had been one of the workers whom it had seemed necessary to stir out the first thing in the morning for years back. On the whole, the fact that he not only had work but plenty of it was a good thing for him. It made all his other experiences sweet. If leisure and play had filled his days, his pleasure, after all, would have been pale.

Frank did not grumble at his lot or think it a hard one, nor would he had it been ten times worse. Children who

were not spoiled by petting and lack of employment usually accepted things as they found them, and made the best of them. Even the farm debt, which might burden the elders very heavily and keep all the household on the borders of shabbiness for years, made but a slight and

Neighbors meet on a frosty morning

occasional impression on the youngsters. Then there were those accidents that are continually happening on a farm — the collapse of a wagon, the sickness of the best cow, the death of the old horse, the giving out of the kitchen stove so that a new one was absolutely necessary. To the mature members of the poorer families these things were almost heart-breaking. It was possible the chil-

dren might shed a few tears over them; but work, and the little pleasures they so readily discovered under the most untoward conditions, soon made the sun shine again, and the mists of trouble melted into forgetfulness.

Boys on small farms which had only two or three cows did not milk regularly. This job was done by the father or a grown-up brother; but at night if the older workers were away from home or too busy with other tasks, the boy was called on. Perhaps the father had to go so many miles over the hills to market that he would not get home until well on in the evening. In that case, you found the boy at nightfall poking about the gloomy barn with a lantern, and doing all the odd jobs that needed to be done before he could milk. When other tasks were finished, the little fellow got the big tin pail at the house, hung his lantern on a nail in the stable, and sat down beside one of the cows. He started the milk streams playing a pleasant tune on the resonant bottom of the pail, and from time to time snuggled his head up against the cow for the sake of the warmth. If the cow gave a pailful, his knees began to ache and shake with the weight of the milk before he had done, and his fingers grew cramped and stiff with their long-continued action. However, the boy always persevered to the end; and if, when he took the milk in, his mother said he had got more than his pa did, he grew an inch taller in conscious pride of his merits.

There was a difference in cows. Some required a good deal more muscle than others to bring the milk; and some were skittish. One of these uneasy cows would keep whacking the boy on the ear with her tail every minute or two all through the milking, and at the same time the coarse and not overclean tuft of hair on the end would go stinging along his cheek. Then, too, the cow would be continually stepping away from him sidewise, and he had to keep edging after her with his stool. These unexpected and uncalled-for dodges made the streams of milk go astray, and he got his overalls and boots well splashed as one of the results. Another was that he lost his temper and dealt the cow a fierce rap with his fist. That made matters worse instead of better. The cow seemed to have no notion of what the lad was chastising her for, and became livelier than ever. It sometimes happened in the end, that the cow gave the boy a sudden poke with a hind foot that sent him sprawling — pail, stool, and all.

When a boy got into trouble, he always felt that the best thing he could do was to hunt up his mother. That was what our boy who met disaster in the cow stable did. He left his lantern behind, but he carried in the pail with the dribble of milk and foam that was still left in the bottom.

His mother was cutting a loaf of bread on the supper table. "Are you through so soon?" she asked. "Why,

Crumbs for the bird

Frank, what's the trouble?" she continued, noticing his woe-begone face.

"The cow kicked me!" replied Frank.

His mother got excited, and stepped over to examine him. "Well, I should say so!" she exclaimed. "You're completely plastered from head to foot. Spilt all the milk, too, didn't you? Well, well, what's the matter with the old cow?"

"I do' know," replied Frank, tearfully. "She just up and kicked me right over."

"Well, never mind," said his mother, soothingly. "You needn't try to milk her any more to-night. You better tie her legs together next time. She's real hateful, that cow is. I've seen the way she'll hook around the other cows lots of times. Here, you run into the bedroom, and I'll get your Sunday clothes for you to change into. Wait a minute till I lay down a newspaper for you to put your old duds on."

A little later Frank went out to the barn and brought in the lantern. Then he sat down to supper, and by the time he had eaten ten mouthfuls of bread and milk he felt entirely comforted and blissful after his late trials.

The boy's usual work at night was to let the cows in from the barnyard where they had been standing, to get down hay and cut up stalks for them, water and feed the horses, bring in wood, not forgetting kindlings for the

Doorstep pets

kitchen stove and chunks to keep the sitting-room fire over night, and, last but not least, he had to do all the odd helping his father happened to call on him for.

The boy enjoyed most of this, more or less, but his real

happiness came when work was done, and he could wash up and sit down to his supper. The consciousness that he had finished the day's labor, the comfort of the indoor warmth, the keen appetite he had won — all combined to give such a complaisancy, both physical and mental, as might move many a grown-up and pampered son of fortune to envy.

The boy usually spent his evenings very quietly. He studied his lessons at the kitchen table, or he drew up

Friendly help in pulling off his boots

close to the sitting-room fire and read a story paper. There was not so much literature in the average family but that

the boy would go through this paper from beginning to end, advertisements and all, and he looked at the pictures half a dozen times over. In the end, the paper was laid away in a closet upstairs, and when he happened on dull times and didn't know what else to do with himself, he wandered up there and delved in this pile of papers. He found such an experience particularly pleasant, for it stirred up the echoes of past enjoyment by a renewed acquaintance with the stories and pictures he had found interesting long before.

Evenings were varied with family talks, and sometimes the boy induced his grandfather to repeat some old rhymes, tell a story, or sing a song. When there were several children in the family, things often became quite lively after supper. The older children were called on to amuse the younger ones, and they had some high times. There was lots of fun and noise, and squalling, too, and some energetic remarks and actions on the part of the elders, calculated to put a sudden stop to certain of the most enterprising and reckless of the proceedings.

The baby was a continual subject of solicitude. His tottering steps gave him many a fall, even on a level, yet he aspired to climb everything climbable; and if he did not tumble down two or three times getting up, he was pretty sure to experience a disastrous descent after the accomplishment of his ambition. He made astonishing expe-

ditions on his hands and knees, and it seemed as if he was liable to be stumbled over and annihilated almost anywhere. The parents realized these things, and is it any wonder, when the rest of the flock got to flying around the room full tilt, that they were alarmed for the baby, and that their voices became raspy and forceful?

Blindman's buff and tag and general skirmishing were not altogether suited to the little room where, besides the chairs and lounge and organ, there was a hot stove and a table with a lamp on it.

A person needed some practice to get much satisfaction from a conversation carried on amid the hubbub. You had to shout every word; and if the children happened to have a special fondness for you, they did most of their tumbling right around your chair.

Some of the children's best times came when the father and mother threw off all other cares and thoughts, and were for the time being the little folks' companions in the evening enjoyment. What roaring fun the small people had when their father played wheelbarrow with them. With what keen delight they watched his motions while he puzzled them with some of the sleight-of-hand tricks he learned when he was young; and how happy they were when mamma became a much-entertained listener while the oldest boy spoke a piece, and rolled his voice, and kept his arms waving in gestures from beginning to end!

The other children were quite overpowered by the larger boy's eloquence. Even the baby sat in quiet on the floor, and let his mouth drop open in astonishment.

The mother was apt to be more in sympathy with these goings-on than the father, and it was on such occasions as he happened to be absent that they had most of this sort of celebration. At such a time, too, the children waxed confidential, and told what calling they intended to adopt when they grew up. This one would be a storekeeper, this one a minister, this one a doctor, this one a singer. They all intended to be rich and famous, and to do fine things for their mother some day. They did not pick out any of the callings for love of gain primarily, but because they thought they would enjoy the life. Indeed, when Tommy said he was going to be a minister, the reason he gave for this desire was that he wanted to ring the bell every Sunday.

Bedtime came on a progressive scale, gauged by the age of the individual. First the baby was tucked away in his crib. Then the three-year-old went through a lingering process of preparation, and after a little run in his nightgown about the room, he was stowed away in crib number two, and his mother sang him a lullaby. These two occupied the same sleeping-room as the parents, and it adjoined the sitting-room. The door to it had been open all the evening, and it was comfortably warm.

Sliding by the riverside

Girls and boys of eight or ten years old would take their own lamps and march off by themselves at an early hour to the cold chambers. Some of the upper rooms had a stovepipe running through, which served to blunt the edge of the cold a trifle, or there might be a register or hole in the floor to allow the heat to come up from below; but, as a rule, the chambers were shivery places in winter, and when the youngsters crept in between the icy sheets, their teeth were set chattering, and it was some minutes before the delightful warmth which followed gained ascendency.

The boy who sat up as late as his elders was usually well started in his teens. Children were not inclined to complain of early hours unless something uncommon was going on. They were tired enough by bedtime. Even the older members of the family were physically weary with the day's work, and the evening talk was apt to be lagging and drowsy in its tone. The father would get to yawning over his reading, and the mother to nodding over her sewing. Many times the chiefs of the household would themselves start bedward soon after eight; and the growing boy usually disregarded the privilege of late hours and took himself off at whatever time after supper his tiredness began to get overpowering.

It would be difficult to say surely that the boy's room I described early in this chapter was an average one. The

boy was not coddled with the best room in the house. In certain dwellings the upper story had but two or three rooms that were entirely finished. The rest was open space roughly floored, and with no ceiling but the rafters and boards of the roof; and some boys had their beds in such quarters, or in a little half-garret room in the L. These unfinished spaces were the less agreeable if the roof happened to be leaky. Sounds of dripping water or sifting snow within one's room are not pleasant. On the other hand, there were plenty of boys who had rooms with striped paper on the walls, and possibly a rag carpet under foot, not to speak of other things equally ornate.

In the matter of knickknacks, most boys did not fill their rooms to any extent with them. The girls were more apt to do that. But a boy was pretty sure to have at least a few treasures in his room. He was not very particular where he stowed them, and he was likely to have some severe trials about house-cleaning time. His mother failed to appreciate the value of his special belongings, and was not in sympathy with his method of placing them. She had a good deal to do therefore with their getting disarranged and thrown away. If fortune favored the boy with an old bureau, he was fairly safe; but things he put on the shelf and stand, and especially those he put right along in a row under the head of the bed — oh, where were they?

Boyhood treasures

The winter breakfast was over about sunrise. All the rolling hills near and far lay pure and white beneath the dome of blue, and they sparkled with many a frosty diamond. I doubt if the boy cared very much about this. He was no stickler for beauty. Questions of comfort and a good time were uppermost in his mind. Nature's shifting forms and colors affected him but mildly as a matter of beauty or sentiment, and the phase that presented itself uppermost was a physical one. If the sun shone on the snow, the thing that impressed the boy was that the glare blinded his eyes. A gray day was the dismal forerunner of a storm. Sunsets, unless particularly gaudy,

had no interest, except as they suggested some weather sign. He delighted most in days that were crystal clear, when every object in the distant hills and valleys stood sharply distinct. He had small fancy for the mellow atmosphere that softened the landscape with gauzy blues. He loved definiteness, not dreams.

Homemade snowshoes

The boys, in common with the animals, felt a friskiness in their bones on the approach of a storm. They would run and shout then for the mere pleasure of it; and play, of whatever sort, received an added zest. It might be the dead of winter, but that did not keep them indoors. If the wind blew a gale and whistled and rattled about the home buildings and made the trees creak, so much the better. Nor would the onset of the storm itself drive

the youngsters indoors. The whirling flakes might increase in number till they blurred all the landscape, and went seething in shifting windrows over every hillock; yet it would be some time before the children would pause in their sliding, skating, or running to think of the indoor fire.

When they did go in, it was as if all the outside

Coasting

breezes had gained sudden entrance; for the small folks came tumbling through the door with a bang and a rush, and there was a scattering of clinging snow when they pulled off their wraps and threw them into convenient chairs or corners. They declared they were almost frozen as they stamped their feet about the kitchen fire, and hugged their elbows to their bodies and rubbed their fingers over the stove's iron top.

"Well, why didn't you come in before, then?" asked their mother.

"Oh, we was playing," they answered. "We been having a lots of fun. The snow is drifted up the road so it's over our shoes now."

"You better take off your shoes, if you've got any snow in 'em," the mother said. "I declare, how you have slopped the floor! And you've made the room cold as a barn. Here, Frank, don't you go into the sittin' room till you get kind o' dried off and decent."

"I just wanted to get the cat," said Frank.

"Well, you can't go in on the carpet with such lookin' shoes, cat or no cat!" was his mother's response.

Meanwhile she had taken her broom and brushed out on the piazza some of the snow lumps and puddles of water the children had scattered.

The stoves were an important item in the boy's winter life. It was a matter of perpetual astonishment

to him how much wood they burned. He had to bring all the wood in, and he found this as much of a drudgery as his sister did the everlasting washing and wiping of dishes. It was his duty to fill the woodboxes

Bringing in wood

about nightfall each day. The woodshed was half dark, and the day had lost every particle of glow and warmth. He could rarely get up his resolution to the point of filling the woodboxes "chuck full." He put in what he thought would "do," and lived in hope he would not be disturbed in other plans by having to replenish the stock before the regulation time the night following. Sometimes he tried

to avoid the responsibility of a doubtfully filled woodbox by referring the case to his mother.

"Is that enough, mamma?" he said.

"Have you filled it?" she asked.

"It's pretty full," replied the boy.

"Well, perhaps that'll do," responded his mother, sympathetically, and the boy became at once conscience free and cheerful.

All through the day, when the boy was in the home neighborhood, he was continually resorting to the stoves to get warm. Every time he came in he made a few passes over the stove with his hands, and he must be crowded for time if he could not take a turn or two before the fire to give the heat a chance at all sides. If he had still more leisure, he secured an apple from the cellar or a cooky from the pantry, and ate it while he warmed up; or he went into the sitting-room and sat by the stove there, and read a little in the paper. One curious thing he early found out was, that he got cold much quicker when he was working than when he was playing; but he quite failed to see that this was because he went at his tasks with less energy, and that because he had less interest in them his fancy exaggerated the discomforts.

Probably the majority of New England boys spent most of the winter in school; though in the hill towns, where roads were bad and houses much scattered, the

smaller schools were closed. While he attended school, the boy had not much time for anything except the home chores; but on Saturdays, and in vacation, he might now and then go into the woods with the men. There was no small excitement in clinging to the sled as it pitched along through the rough wood roads amid a clanking of chains and the shouts of the driver. The men, who were familiar with the work, seemed to have no hesitation in driving anywhere and over all sorts of obstacles. The boy did not know whether he was most exhilarated or frightened, but he had no thought of showing a lack of courage, and he hung on, and when he reached the end of the journey, thought he had been having some great fun.

The boy had brought his own small axe, and was all eagerness to prove his virtues as a woodsman. He whacked away energetically at some of the young growths, and when he brought to the ground a sapling three inches through, he was triumphant, and wanted all the other choppers to look and see what he had done. He found himself getting into quite a sweat over his work, and he had to roll up his earlaps and take his overcoat off and hang it on a stump. Then he dug into the work again.

In time the labor became monotonous to him, and he was moved to tramp through the snow and investigate the work of the others. His father was making a clean, wide gash in the side of a great hemlock. Every blow

was effective, and seemed to go just where he wanted it to. The boy wondered why, when he himself cut off a tree, he made his cut so jagged. He stood a long time watching his father's chips fly, and then gained a safe distance to see the tree tremble and totter as the opposite cut deepened, and neared its heart. What a mighty crash the tree made when it fell! How the snow flew, and the branches snapped! The boy was awed for the moment, then was fired with enthusiasm, and rushed in with his small axe to help trim off the branches. After a time there came a willingness that his father should finish the operation, and he wandered off to see how the other workers were getting on.

By and by he stirred up the neighborhood with shouts to the effect that he had found some tracks. His mind immediately became chaotic with ideas of hunting and trapping. Now that he had begun to notice, he discovered frequent other tracks, and some, he was pretty sure, were those of foxes and some of rabbits and some of squirrels. Why, the woods were just full of game! — he would bring out his box trap to-morrow, and the certainty grew on him that he would not only catch some creatures that would prove a pleasant addition to the family larder, but he would also have numerous skins nailed up on the side of the barn that would bring him a nice little sum of pocket money.

That evening he brought out the box trap and got it into working order, and made all the younger children wild with excitement over his story of the tracks he had seen, and his plans for trapping. They each wanted a

A chipmunk up a tree

share, and were greatly disappointed the next day when their father would not let them all go to the woods.

The boy set his trap, and moved it every few days

to what he thought would prove a more favorable place, but he had no luck to boast of. Yet he caught something three times. The first time he had the trap set in an evergreen thicket in a little space almost bare of snow. He was pleased enough, one day, to find the trap sprung, and at once became all eagerness to know what he had inside. He pulled out the spindle at the back and looked in, but the tiny hole did not let in light enough. Very cautiously he lifted the lid a trifle. Still nothing was to be seen, and he feared the trap had sprung itself. When he ventured to raise the lid a bit more, a little, slim-legged field-mouse leaped out. The boy clapped the lid down hard, but he was too late. The mouse hopped away, and in a flash had disappeared into a hole at the foot of a small tree. The boy was disappointed to have even such a creature escape him.

The next time, whatever it was he caught gnawed a hole through the corner of the box, and had gone about its business when the boy made his morning visit to the trap. Then he took the trap home and lined the inside with tin.

He had no luck for some days after, and finally forgot the trap altogether. It was not till spring that he happened on it again. A tingle of the old excitement stirred in his veins when he saw that the trap was sprung. He raised the lid with all the caution born of experience, but the red

At work with the cross-cut saw

squirrel which was within had been long dead; and when the boy thought of its slow death by starvation in that dark box, he felt that he never would want to trap any more.

The boy found the woods much more enjoyable than the woodpile when it was deposited in the home yard. He knew that so long as there was a stick of it left he would never have a moment of leisure that would not run the risk of being interrupted with a suggestion that he go out and shake the saw awhile. The hardest woods, that made the hottest fires, were the ones the saw bit into most slowly and were the most discouraging. The best the boy could do was to hunt out such soft wood as the pile contained, and all the small sticks. He attained some variety in his labor by piling up the sawed sticks in a bulwark to keep the wind off, only it has to be acknowledged that he never really succeeded in accomplishing this purpose. But the unsawed pile grew gradually smaller, and his folks were not so severe that they expected the boy to do a man's work or to keep at it as steadily as a person of mature years. He stopped now and then to play with the smaller children, and to go to the house to see what time it was, or to get something to eat. Besides, his father worked with him a good deal, and if there were times when the minutes went slowly, the days, as a whole, slipped along quickly, and, before the boy was aware, winter was at an end if the woodpile wasn't.

II

SPRING

WITH the coming of March comes spring, according to the almanac, but in New England the snow-storms and wintry gales hold sway often to the edge of April. Yet some quite vigorous thaws generally occur before the end of the month. There are occasional days of such warmth and quiet that you can fairly hear the snow melt, and the air is full of the tinkle of running brooks. You catch the sound of a woodpecker tapping in the orchard, and about that time the small boy would tumble into the house, jubilant over the fact that he had seen a bluebird flitting through the branches of the elm before the house. All the children made haste to run forth into the yard to see the sight. Even the mother threw a shawl over her head and stepped out on the piazza.

"Yessir! there he is!" said Frank's younger brothers, Tommy and Johnny, excitedly. "That's a bluebird, sure pop!"

Puddles had gathered in the soggy snow along the roadside, and the little stream in the meadow had overflowed

its banks. When the boy perceived this, he became immediately anxious to get into his rubber boots and go wading. His mother had a doubtful opinion of these

A springtime pond

wadings, but it was such a matter of life and death to the boy that she had not the heart to refuse him, and contented herself with admonitions not to stay out too long, not to wade in too deep, not to get his clothes wet, etc., etc.

The boy began with one of the small puddles, for he had these cautions in his mind, but the scope of his enterprise continually enlarged, and he presently was trying to determine just how deep a place he could venture into without letting the water encroach over his boot-tops. He

did not desist from the experiment until he felt a cold trickle down one of his legs, from which sensation he concluded that he got in just a little too far that time, and he beat a hasty retreat. But he had made his mind easy on the point as to how deep he could go, and now turned his attention to poking about with a stick he had picked up. He was quite charmed with the way he could make the water and slush spatter with that stick. When he grew tired of this performance, and the accumulating wet began

On the fence over the brook

to penetrate his clothing here and there, he adjourned to the meadow and set his stick sailing down the stream. It filled his heart with delight to see how it pitched and whirled, and he stumped along the brook borders and

shouted at it as he kept it company. Later he returned to the roadway and made half a dozen dams or more to stop the tiny rills that were coursing down its furrows. He did this with such serious thoughtfulness and with such frequent, studious pauses as would well fit the actions of the world's great philosophers.

No doubt the boy was making discoveries and learning lessons; for the farm, with varied Nature always so close, is an excellent kindergarten, and the farm children are all the time improving their opportunities after some fashion.

When the boy went indoors, his mother showed symptoms of alarm over his condition. *He* thought he had kept pretty dry, but his mother wanted to know what on earth he had been doing to get so wet.

"Ain't been doin' nothin'," responded Tommy.

"Well, I should say so!" remarked his mother. "Here, you let me sit you in this chair to kind o' drean, while I pull off them soppin' mittens."

She wrung the mittens out at the sink and hung them on the line back of the stove. Next she pulled off the boy's boots, and stood him up while she removed his overcoat, and lastly pushed him, chair and all, up by the fire, where he could put his feet on the stove-hearth. Tommy did not see the necessity for all this fuss. He felt dry enough, and all right; yet, so long as his mother did not

get disturbed to the chastising point, he found a good deal of comfort in having her attend to him in this way.

Comfort by the fire

It was on one of the still, sunshiny March days that it occurred to the oldest boy of the household the maple sap must have begun to run. He did not waste much time in making tracks for the shop, where he hunted up some old spouts and an auger. He intended to tap two or three of the trees near the house, anyway. There was no lack of helpers. All the smaller children were on hand to watch and advise him, and to fetch pans from the house

and prop them up under the spouts. They watched eagerly for the appearance of the first drops, and when they sighted them each exclaimed: "There it is! The sap runs!" and they wanted their older brother to stop his boring at the next tree and come and look.

But Frank felt that he was too old to show enthusiasm about such things, and he simply told them that he guessed he had "seen sap 'fore now."

The children took turns applying their mouths to the end of spout number one to catch the first drops that trickled down it. In days following they were frequent visitors to these tapped trees, with the avowed purpose of seeing how the sap was running; but it was to be noticed that at the same time they seemed always to find it convenient to take a drink from a pan.

In the more hilly regions of New England most of the farms have a sugar orchard on them, and the tree-tapping that began about the house was soon transferred to the woods. The boy went along, too — indeed, what work was there about a farm that he did not have a hand in, either of his own will or because he had to? But the phase of sugar making I wish to speak of now particularly is that found on the farms which possessed no maple orchard. The boy saw that the trees about the house were attended to, as a matter of course, and he guarded the pans and warned off the neighbors' boys when he

thought they were making too free with the pans' contents. Each morning he went out with a pail, gathered the sap, and set it boiling in a kettle on the stove. In time came the final triumph, when, some morning, the family left the molasses pot in the cupboard, and they had maple syrup on their griddle-cakes.

Boiling down sap in the yard

It was not every boy whose enterprise stopped with the tapping of the home yard shade trees. On many farms

an occasional maple grew in the fields, and sometimes there were a few in a patch of near woodland. In such a case the boy cut a lot of elder stalks while it was still winter, cleaned out the pith, and shaped them into spouts. At the first approach of mild weather he tapped the scattered trees, and in order to catch the sap, distributed among them every receptacle the house afforded that did not leak, or whose leaks could be soldered or beeswaxed. After that, while the season lasted, he and his brother swung a heavy tin can on a staff between them and made periodical tours sap-collecting. These frequent tramps through mud and snow in all kinds of weather soon became monotonously wearisome, and the boys were not sorry when the sap flow ended.

With the going of the snow came a mud spell that lasted fully a month. To drive anywhere with a team took forever. It was drag, drag, drag, and slop, slop, slop all the way. Even the home dooryard was little better than a bog, and the boy could never seem to step out anywhere without coming in loaded with mud — at least, so his mother said. She had continually to be warning him to keep out of the sitting-room, and at times seemed to be thrown into as much consternation over some of his footprints that she found on the kitchen floor as was Robinson Crusoe over the discovery of that lone footprint in the sand. Just as soon as she heard the boy's shuffle on the piazza

At the roadside watching a team go by

and caught sight of him entering the kitchen door, she said, "There, Frank, don't you come in till you've wiped your feet."

"I have wiped 'em," said Frank.

"Why, just look at those boots of yours!" his mother

responded. "I should think you'd got about all the mud there was in the yard on 'em."

"I never saw such sticky old stuff," declared Frank. "Your broom's most wore out already."

"Well," remarked his mother, "what are you gettin' into the mud for all over that way, every time you step out? Pa's laid down boards all around the yard to walk on. Why don't you go on them?"

"They ain't laid where I want to go," Frank replied.

"Anyway," was his mother's final remark, "I can't have my kitchen floor mussed up by you trackin' in every five minutes."

But the really severe experiences in this line came when the barnyard was cleaned out. For several days the boy's shoes were "a sight," and his journeyings were accompanied with such an odor that his mother warned him off entirely from her domain. He was not allowed to walk in and get that piece of pie for his lunch, but had it handed out to him through the narrowly opened kitchen door. When mealtime arrived, he was commanded to leave his boots and overalls in the woodshed, and he came into the house in his stocking-feet. Even then his mother made derogatory remarks, though he told her *he* "couldn't smell anything."

After the snow went, it was astonishing how quickly the green would clothe the fields. Nature, with its bursting

buds and abounding blossoms, was teeming with life again. I think the sentiment of the boy was touched by this season more than by any other. The unfolding of all this new life was full of mysterious charm. It was a delight to tread the velvety turf, to find the first flowers, to catch the oft-repeated sweetness of a phœbe's song, or the more forceful trilling of a robin at sundown. Spring appealed to the boy most strongly at nightfall. He could still feel the heat of the sun when it lingered at the horizon, and in the gentle warmth of its rays enjoyed a run about the yard, and clapped his hands at the little clouds of midges that were sporting in the air. As soon as the sun disappeared, the cool damp of evening was at once apparent, and from the swampy hollows came many strange pipings and croakings. The boy wondered vaguely about all the creatures that made these noises, and imitated their voices from the home lawn. When the dusk began to deepen into darkness, he was glad to get indoors to the light and warmth of the kitchen.

To tell the truth, our boy was rather afraid of the dark. Just what he feared was but dimly defined, though bears, thieves, and Indians were among the fearsome shades that peopled the night glooms. It did not take much of a noise, when he was out alone in the dark, to set his heart thumping, and his imagination pictured dreadful possibilities in the shapes and movements that greeted his eyesight.

A drink from the spout

The only place that roused his anxiety in the daytime was the cow stable. A hole in the floor opened down into the barn cellar, and this cavity was always gloomy and mysterious, and stirred the boy's fears every time he had to clean out the stables. So he used to call the dog and send him under the barn to drive the spooks away, and then would work like a beaver to get the stables cleaned before the dog grew sick of his job and came out.

A little burying-ground on a hill near his home also troubled him a good deal; for he knew that spooks liked to haunt just such places. While it was broad daylight he was all right, but when dusk came and he had to pass the cemetery, he walked fast and stepped lightly. He was too scared to run; for it seemed to him if he did run, he would have a whole pack of ghosts right on his heels. However, when he got old enough to go to see the girls, his fears suddenly left him, and he could come home past the burying-ground in the small hours of the morning without a tremor.

While he was a little fellow, his fear of the dark even assailed him when he was in the house. He had a notion there might be a lurking savage in the pantry, or the cellar, or in the dusky corners of the hallways, or, worst of all, under his bed. Those fears were most vivid after he had been reading some tale of desperate adventure or of mystery, dark doings, and evil characters. Very good

books and papers often had in them the elements that produced such scarey effects. These were the sources of his timidity; for dime-novel trash, although not altogether absent, was not common in the country. The boy did not usually acquire much of his fear from the talk of his fellows, and his parents certainly did not foster such feelings. It was undoubtedly his reading, mainly.

He rarely felt fear if he had company, or if he was where it was light, or after he got into bed—that is, unless there were strange noises. What made these noises he heard sometimes in the night? He certainly never heard such noises in the daytime. The boy did not fear rats. He knew them. They could race through the walls, and grit their teeth on the plastering, and throw all those bricks and things, whatever they were, down inside the hollow spaces that they wanted to. But it was the creakings and crackings and softer noises, that he couldn't tell what they were, which troubled him. The very best that he could do was to pull the covers up over his head and shiver into sleep again. But if the boy had frights, they were intermittent for the most part and soon forgotten.

With the thawing of the snow on the hills and the early rains there came, each spring, a time of flood on all the brooks and rivers. No one appreciated this more than the boy who was so fortunate as to have a home on the banks of a good-sized stream. Water, in whatever shape,

possessed a magical delight for him, if we except that for washing purposes. It did not matter whether it was a dirty puddle or a sparkling rivulet or the spirting jet at the highway watering-trough — they all enticed him to paddle and splash. He even saw a touch of the beautiful and sublime in some of the water effects. There was a charm to him in the placid pond that mirrored every object along its banks, or, on brisker days, in the choppy waves that broke the surface and curled up on the muddy shore. He liked to follow the course of a brook, and took pleasure in noting the clearness of its waters and in watching its crystal leaps. When spring changed the quiet streams into muddy torrents, and they became foaming and wild and unfamiliar, the boy found the sight impressive and exhilarating.

But it was on the larger rivers that the floods had most meaning. The water set back in all the hollows, and broadened into wide lakes on the meadows, and covered portions of the main road. The boy cut a notch in a stick and stuck in his mark at the water's edge that he might keep posted as to how fast the river was rising. He got the spike pole and fished out the flood-wood that floated within reach. If he was old enough to manage a boat, he rowed out into the stream and hitched on to an occasional log or large stick that was sailing along on the swift current. For this purpose, if he was alone, he had fastened at the

back end of the boat an iron hook that he pounded into the log. It was hard, jerky work towing a log to shore, and he did not always succeed in landing his capture. Sometimes the hook would keep pulling out; sometimes the thing he hitched on to was too bulky or clumsy, and, after a long, hard pull, panting and exhausted, he found

Catching flood wood

himself getting so far downstream that he reluctantly knocked out the hook, rowed inshore, and crept in the eddies along the bank back to his starting-place. There was

just one trouble about this catching flood-wood — it increased the woodpile materially, and made a lot of work, sawing and chopping, that the boy had little fancy for.

Watching for logs

During the early spring there was sometimes a long-continued spell of dry weather. In the woods the trees were still bare, and the sunlight had free access to the leaf-carpeted earth. At such a time, if a fire got started among the shrivelled and tinder-like leaves, it was no easy task to put it out. Whole neighborhoods sallied forth to fight it, and several days and nights might pass before it was under control. The boy was among the first on the spot, and with his hoe immediately began a vigorous scratching

to clear a path in the leaves that the fire would not burn across. The company scattered, and sometimes the boy found himself alone. Close in front, extending away in both directions, was the ragged fire-line leaping and crackling. The woods were still, the sun shone bright, and there was a sense of mystery and danger in the presence of those sullen, devouring flames. Now came a puff of wind that caused the fire to make a sudden dash forward and that shrouded the boy with smoke. He ran back to a point of safety and listened to the far-off shouts of the men. The fire was across the path he had hoed, and he clambered up the hill to find company.

When night came the boy wandered off home, to do his work and eat supper. If he could get permission, he was out again with his hoe in the evening. The scene was then more than ever full of a wild charm. From the sombreness of the unburned tracts he looked into the hot, wavering line of dazzling flames and on into regions where lingered many sparkling embers which the fire had not yet burned out. Now and then there was a pile of wood that was a great mass of glowing coals; or he saw the high stump of some dead tree burning like a torch in the blackness. The boy thought the men did more talking and advising than work. He did not accomplish much himself. The men kept together, and he hung about the half-lighted groups, listened to what was said, and

Ginger cookies

with the others did some desultory scratching to keep the fire from gaining new ground at the point they were guarding. By and by a man came hallooing his way through the woods to them, bringing a milk-can full of coffee. Every worker, old and young, took a drink, and they all cracked jokes and exchanged opinions with the bearer till he started off to find the next group. Some of the men stayed on guard all night, but the boy and his father, about ten o'clock, left the crackle and darting of the flames behind them, and betook themselves to a gloomy wood-road that led toward home. There had been nothing very alarming in the day's adventures, but the boy would never forget the experience.

Fire was fascinating to the boy in any form. He burned his fingers at the stove damper when he was a baby. He liked to look at the glow of a lamp; and a candle, with its soft flicker and halo, was especially pleasing. Then those new matches his folks had got, that went off with a snap and burst at once into a sudden blaze — he had never seen anything like them! They reminded him of the delights of Fourth of July.

A chief event of the spring was a bonfire in the garden. There was an accumulation of dead vines and old pea-brush and apple-tree trimmings that often made a large heap. The fire was enjoyable at whatever time it came, but it was at its best if they touched it off in the evening.

The whole family then gathered to see it, and Frank fixed up a seat for his mother and the baby out of a board and some blocks, and invited some of the neighbors' boys to be on hand. He put an armful of leaves under a corner of the pile and set it on fire with some of those new matches. The neighbors' boys gathered around and told him how the lighting ought to be done, and even offered to do it themselves. When the blaze fairly started and began to trickle up through the twigs above it, the smaller children jumped for joy and clapped their hands, and ran to get handfuls of leaves and scattered rubbish to throw on. Frank poked the pile this way and that with his pitchfork, and the neighbors' boys lighted the ends of long sticks and waved them about in the air. Even the baby cooed with delight.

The father had a rake and did most of the work that was really necessary, while the boys furnished all the action and noise essential to make the occasion a success. When the blaze was at its highest and the heat penetrated far back, the company became quiet, and they stood about exchanging occasional words and simply watching the flames lick up the brush and flash upward and disappear amid the smoke and sparks that rose high toward the dark deeps of the sky. The frolic was resumed when the pile of brush began to fall inward, and presently the mother said she and the baby and the smaller children

must go to the house. The children protested, but they had to go, nevertheless. Not long afterward the embers of the fire were all raked together, and Frank and the neigh-

Rubbing down Old Billy

bors' boys fooled around a little longer, and got about a half-dozen final warming ups and then tramped off homeward in whistling happiness.

On the day following, the garden was ploughed and har-

rowed. Then the boy had to help scratch it over and even it off with a rake, and was kept on the jump the rest of the time getting seeds and planters and other tools.

Meanwhile he induced his father to let him have a corner of the garden for his own, and got the paternal advice as to what he had best raise in it to make his fortune. He scratched over the plot about twice as fine as the rest of the garden, and would not let any of the old hens that were hanging around looking for worms come near it. He concluded that peas were the things to bring in money, but he was tempted to try three or four hills of potatoes between the rows after he had the peas planted. He saved space for a hill of watermelons, and, just to fill up the blanks, which seemed rather large with nothing showing, he put in, as a matter of experiment, various seeds here and there, from time to time, when it came handy and the thought occurred to him. He was somewhat astonished at the way things came up. Indeed, he thought they would never get done coming up, and they were pretty well mixed in their arrangement. He was so discouraged over the constant sprouting that he hoed off clean the most troublesome half of his domain and transplanted a few cabbages on to it. In his first enthusiasm he had induced his mother to come out every day or two and look at his garden-patch, and he enjoyed telling her his plans; but he left that off for a while when his

vegetables became so erratic, and waited till he could thin them out and bring their proceedings within his comprehension.

It was in spring, more than any other season, that the boy's ideas budded with new enterprises. He forgot most of them by the time he had them fairly started, and none of them were likely to have any pecuniary value. But that never damped his enthusiasm for rushing into new ones. The hunting fever was apt to take him pretty soon after the snow went, and he made a bow and whittled out some arrows. Then he was ready to go to the woods.

Willow whistles

Suppose we follow him along the rough roadway among the trees. The day is still and warm. The leaves are not yet out, and the sunlight comes in freely through the gray tree-twigs, and glistens on the brown leaves which carpet the ground. The air is full of sleepy quiet; yet if one listens, he can hear a multitude of little noises — ticking sounds and light rustlings, as if buds were bursting, and as if all the green undergrowth of the woods was pushing up amid the withered last year's leaves.

The little boy tramps steadily onward. He does not shoot at the chickadees hopping about in the twigs of a thicket he passes. He does not shoot at the bluebird he sees flitting through the green boughs of a hemlock. He does not shoot at Woodpecker who is earnestly hammering away at a dead tree bole. He does not shoot at Chipmunk who chatters at him from a roadside boulder as he approaches, and then suddenly pops out of sight, and an instant later is seen scudding up a stout oak, where he again sets up a loud chattering.

No, the boy does not shoot at these, for his mother has told him they are his friends, and that so long as they do no harm they have the right to live and to make a home in the woods, or anywhere else they choose to stay.

What he is hunting is bears. He whistles softly as he plods along; but all at once he breaks off short in his

The hunter

tune, and half stooping goes forward on tiptoe. "Oh, oh, what a big fellow!" he whispers to himself. "I'll get this one, I'm sure. My, how black he is!"

The boy does not appear at all frightened. In fact, the creature he is moving toward so stealthily looks very much like an old stump. However, that does not matter.

The hunter drops on one knee and fits an arrow to his

bow. "Gr-r-r-r!" he says in his gruffest growl. "There, he sees me! Quick now, right between the eyes!"

The arrow flies. "Hurrah! hit fair and square!" the boy shouts.

He runs and pulls out his arrow. "This *is* a big fellow!" says he. "Fat, too," he adds, punching the stump with his arrow. "He'll weigh a million pounds, or pretty near it, I guess. He's larger'n the one I shot last summer in the Sarah Nevados. I think when I sell his hide I can buy that top and a dozen marbles I've been wanting. Well, I must get to skinning him. Where's my bowie-knife?"

He dives into his pocket and brings up a small, one-bladed knife, and opening it, proceeds vigorously to attack the stump. The bark hangs loosely, and the knife is more of a bother than a help. So he puts it back in his pocket and finishes the stripping with his fingers.

Then he starts in search of new adventures. Stumps are numerous, and he is very successful. He not only shoots ten or fifteen bears, but several lions and tigers. "I vum!" says he, after a while, "this is hot work."

He pauses, pushes his hat back, and draws his sleeve across his forehead. "But it wouldn't do to lie down and rest," he continues. "There's bears all around, and lions like enough up 'most any tree ready to drop down

On the way to pasture

on a man if he isn't on the lookout. I declare! I feel hungry."

He searches about till he finds a birch twig to chew on, and then looks up at the sun. "Must be nearly noon," he comments. "Dinner'll be ready in a little while, and I'd better put for home."

So saying, he slings his bow over his shoulder, and, entirely careless of the dangerous woods he is in, he goes skipping down the rough road that leads homeward. He is thinking of the dinner that awaits him, and he looks neither to the right hand nor to the left. But luck seemed to be attendant on our unwary hunter. No bear pounced on him, he was not gobbled up by any of the prowling tigers, and no lion leaped down on him from the tree-tops. Thus it happened that our hero ended this adventurous morning in safety.

Occasionally he played Indian with his bow and arrows, and he would perhaps visit the resorts of the hens and collect enough feathers to make a circlet to wear around his head. After he was properly decorated, he tramped off to shoot such of the ferocious wild beasts as he happened to know the names of, or he would go and scalp the neighbors' boys.

Sometimes he induced his father to saw out a wooden gun, and armed with that, he turned pioneer. Then savages and wild animals both had to catch it. He would

skulk around in the most approved fashion and say "Bang!" for his gun every time he fired, and like enough he would kill half a hundred Indians and a dozen grizzly bears in one forenoon. He was as fearless as you please — until night came.

Not all the boy's hunting was so mild as to stop at the killing off of bears and Indians. Sometimes he shot his arrows at real, live things, or he might use pebbles and a sling, or he practised throwing stones; and he did not resist the temptation to make the birds and squirrels, and possibly the cats and the chickens, his marks. It is true he rarely hit any of them; and a sensitive boy, if he seriously hurt one of the creatures fired at, had a sickening twinge of remorse. But there were boys who would only glory in the straightness of their aim. Something of the savage still lingered in their nature, and they felt a sense of prowess and power in bringing down that which, in spite of its life and movement, did not escape them. It was to them a much grander and more enjoyable thing than to hit a lifeless and unmoving mark.

The boys — at any rate, many of them — were at times, in a thoughtless way, downright cruel. How they would bang about the old horse on occasion! To drown a cat or wring the neck of a chicken aroused no compunctions, and they would run half a mile to be present at a hog-killing. They had scarcely a grain of sympathy for the

worm they impaled on their fish-hooks; they killed the grasshopper who would not give them "molasses"; they crushed the butterfly's wings in catching it with their straw hats; and they pulled off insects' limbs to see them wriggle, or to find out how the insect would get along

The opening of the fishing season

without them. I will not extend the horrible list, and I am not sure but that most boys were guiltless of the majority of these charges. However, they were much too apt to play the part of destroyers. This spirit was shown in the way the boy would whip off the heads of flowers along his path, if he had a stick in his hand. It was shown

also in the manner he gathered them when gathering happened to be his purpose. Their bright colors were then the chief attraction. If he secured the blossoms, that was enough. He would pick ten thousand blossoms and not have a green leaf among them. Nor did he think of their life or of their beauty where they stood, or of the future. He picked them in wholly needless quantities, snapping off their heads, pulling them up by the roots — any way to get the greatest number in the shortest possible time. If the boy had been as thorough as he was ruthless, you could never find more flowers of the same sort on that spot. This does not argue a total disregard for the flowers, but it is a pity to love a thing to destruction.

The first token of spring in the flower line that the boy brought into the house was apt to be a sprig of pussy-willow. The fuzzy catkins were to his mind very odd and interesting and pretty. The ground was still snow-covered, and they had started with the first real thaw. Before the pastures got their first green, the boy went off to find the new arbutus buds, that smelled sweetest of all the flowers he knew, unless it might be the azalea, that came later. Already, by the brook, were the queer skunk-cabbage blossoms, and the boy sometimes pulled one to pieces, and even sniffed the odor, just to learn how bad it really was. He perhaps found a stout, short-

stemmed dandelion thus early open in some warm, grassy hollow, and a few days later the anemone's dainty cups were out in full and were trembling on their slender stems with every breath of air. In pasture bogs and along the brooks were violets — mostly blue; but in places grew yellow and white ones, ready to delight their finder. The higher and drier slopes of the pastures were sometimes almost blue in spots with the coarse bird-foot violets, while the lower grazing ground was as white with the multitudes of innocents as if there had been a light snowfall.

Pasture innocents

Occasionally the violets were utilized to "fight roosters." To do this, two boys would each take a violet and hook

them together and see which fellow's would pull the other's head off — see which violet would stand the most strain.

Along the roadways and fences the wild-cherry trees were clouded full of white petals, and in the woods were great dashes of white where the dogwoods had unfurled their blossoms. By the end of May the meadows were like a night sky full of stars, so thick were the dandelions, and on the rocks of the hillsides the columbines swayed, full of their oddly shaped, pendulous bells. In some damp woodpath the boy was filled with rejoicing by the finding of one of the rare lady's-slippers where he had been gathering wakerobin. Another spring flower that possessed a special interest to the boy was the Jack-in-the-pulpit, but it hardly seemed a flower to him, it was so queer.

Spring had three days with an individuality which made them stand out among the rest. Earliest of these came April Fool's Day. The only idea the boy had about it was that the more things he could make the rest of the world believe on that day which were not so, the better. Most of the tricks were not very clever or commendable, and the boy himself felt that he was sometimes approaching uncomfortably close to lying. The common form of fooling was to get a person to look at something that was not in sight.

"See that crow out there!" says the boy to his father.

Carpet beating

"Where?" asks his father, when he looks out.

"April fool!" shouts the boy, and his pleasure over the "slick" way he fooled his pa, lasted a half hour or more until he discovered that he had been walking around for he didn't know how long with a slip of paper on his

back his sister had pinned there; and what he read on it when he got it off was "April fool!" He did not feel so happy then, but he saved the paper to pin on some one else. All day his brain was full of schemes to get people looking at the imaginary objects to which he called their attention, and at the same time he was full of suspicions himself, and you had to be very sharp and sudden to fool him. When night came he rejoiced in the fact that he had got one or two "fools" off on every member of the family, and there is no knowing what a nuisance he had made of himself among the rest of his friends. It gave him a grand good appetite, and he was inclined to be quite conversational. His remarks, however, assumed a milder tenor when he bit into a portly doughnut and found it made of cotton. He was afraid his mother was trying to fool him. He wouldn't have thought it of her!

Soon after this day came Fast Day. School "let out," and there was meeting at the church, but most folks did not pay much attention to that, and, it being a holiday, they ate rather more than on other days, if anything, and they joked about its being "fast" in the sense that it was not slow. Our boy did what work he had to do, and then asked the privilege of going off to see some other boy and have some fun. However, that was a thing which happened on all sorts of days. He was always ready with that request when he had leisure, and made it oftentimes,

too, when he had no leisure in any one's opinion but his own.

The 30th of May was Decoration Day, and a company of soldiers always came with a band and flags, to decorate

Spring chickens

the graves of the soldiers in the village cemetery, and there was singing and other exercises, and everybody was present. The boy had his bouquet, and he was on the spot promptly and chatting with some of his companions. Lines of teams were hitched along the roadside, and two

or three scores of people had gathered near the cemetery entrance. The occasion had something of the solemnity of a funeral, and even the boys lowered their voices as they talked. The sound of a drum and fife was presently heard around the turn of the road, and the soldiers, under their drooping flag, approached and filed into the cemetery. A song, an address, and a prayer followed—all very impressive to the boy, out there under the skies with the wide, blossoming landscape about. Finally he laid his flowers with the others on the graves, the soldiers formed in line, the fife piped once more, the drum beat, and off they went down the road. Then the people began a more cheerful visiting, and there was a cramping of wheels as the teams turned to go homeward. The boy, with his friends, poked about among some of the old stones, and then lingered along in the rear of the scattered groups that were taking the road leading to the village.

III

SUMMER

THE boy felt that summer had really come about the time he got a new straw hat and began to go barefoot. Each year when he first trod the earth without shoes and stockings, he was as frisky as were the cows when, after the winter's sojourn in the barn, they were let out to go to pasture for the first time. The boy remembered very well how he nearly ran his legs off on that occasion, for the cows wanted to career all through the neighborhood, and they kicked and capered and galloped and hoisted their tails in the air, and were as bad as a circus broken loose.

The boy would have gone barefoot some weeks before the time when he actually did so, only he could not get his mother to understand how warm the earth really was. It was cooler now than he expected it would be, but he got into a glow running, and in a few days the exposure toughened his feet so that he could endure almost anything — anything but shoes and stockings. He hated to put those uncomfortable things on, and, when he did, was glad to kick them off at the earliest opportunity.

Even the first frosts of autumn did not at once bring the shoes into use. He would drive the cows up the whitened

The barefooted children

lane, and slip shivering along in the tracks brushed half clear of frost by the herd, certain that he would be entirely comfortable a little later when the sun was well up.

But the joy of bare feet was not altogether complete. About half the time the boy went with a limp. He had hurt his toe, cut his heel, or met with some like mishap. There were things always lying around for him to step on, and in the late summer certain wicked burs ripened in the meadow that had hooks to their prickles. These prickles hurt enough going in, but were, oh, so much worse pulling out! The boy never liked to walk on newly mown land on account of the stiff grass stubs. Yet he could manage pretty well by sliding his feet along and making the stubble lie flat when he stepped on it. The gains of bare feet certainly much more than offset the losses, to his mind; for he could tramp and wade almost everywhere and in all kinds of weather, with no fear of tearing his stockings, muddying his shoes, or "getting his feet wet."

He appreciated this going barefoot most, perhaps, after a rainstorm. The older people had no idea what fun it was to slide and spatter through the pools and puddles of the roadway. There was the boy's mother, for instance—she failed to have the mildest kind of appreciation of it. She had even less, if that is possible, when the boy came in to her after he had astonished himself by a sudden slip that seated him in the middle of one of the puddles.

Just after a storm, when the air was very still, the boy was sometimes impressed by the apparent depth of those

shallow pools. They seemed to go down miles and miles, and he could see the clouds and sky reflected in their calm deeps. He was half inclined to keep away from their edges, lest he should fall over the brink and go down and down till he was drowned among those far-off cloud reflections.

Another roadway sentiment the boy sometimes entertained was connected with the ridges of dirt thrown up by the wagon-wheels. Their shadows made pictures to him as of a great line of jagged rocks and recalled to his memory the wild coast of Norway illustrated in his geography. He felt like an explorer as he followed the ever changing craggedness of their outlines.

I mentioned that the boy had a new straw hat with the beginning of summer, but the newness was not apparent two days afterward. It had by then lost its store aspect and had taken to itself an individual shape all its own. Presently the ribbon began to fly loose on the breezes, and then the colt took a bite out of the edge, and a general dissolution set in. The boy used it to chase grasshoppers and butterflies with, and one day he brought it home half full of strawberries he had picked in a field. On another occasion he utilized it to catch pollywogs in when he was wading, and he hastened its ruin by using it as a ball on summer evenings to throw in the air. He thought, one night, he had put it past all usefulness when, not thinking

where he had placed it, he went and sat down in the chair that it happened to occupy. You would not have known it for a hat when he picked it up, though he straightened it out after a fashion and concluded it would serve for a while longer, anyway. But things presently got to that desperate pass where the brim was gone and there was a bristly hole in the top. "The folks" saw the hat could not possibly last the summer through, and the next time his father went to town he bought the boy a new one.

In the barn

Of course, he told him to be more careful with this than with the old one, when he gave it to him.

In swimming

The summer was not far advanced when the boy became anxious as to whether the water had warmed up enough in the streams to make it allowable to go in swimming. As for the little rivers among the hills, they never did get warm and in the hottest spells of midsummer it made

the boy's teeth chatter to jump into their cold pools. But there was a glowing reaction after the plunge, and if he did not stay in too long, he came out quite enlivened by his bath. The bathing places on these woodland streams were often quite picturesque. It might be a spot where the stream widened into a little pond hemmed in by walls of green foliage, whose branches in places drooped far out over the water. It might be in a rocky gorge strewn with boulders, where the stream filled the air with a continual roar and murmur as it dashed down the rapids and plunged from pool to pool. On the large rivers of the valleys the swimming places had usually muddy shores and a willow-screened bank, and there were logs to float on or an old boat to push about. In favorable weather the boys would go in swimming every evening, and they made the air resound for half a mile about with their shouts and splashings.

June opened with lots of work in the planting line. The boy had to drop fertilizer and potatoes some days from morning till night, by which time he was ready to drop himself. In corn planting he had his own bag of tarred corn and his hoe, and took the row next to his father's. For a spell he might keep up, but as the day advanced he lagged behind, and his father planted a few hills occasionally on the boy's row to encourage him.

One of the things a boy soon became an adept at was

leaning on his hoe. He did this most when he was alone in the field and not liable to sudden interruptions in his meditations. At such times he got lonesome, and he felt more tired than when he had company. He wondered why the dinner horn didn't blow. You would not think a hoe an easy thing to lean on; but the boy would stand on one leg, with the hoe-handle hooked under his shoulder, for any length of time.

Waiting for the dinner horn

One day, when the boy stood thus meditating, some big ants crawled up his leg inside of his overalls. This was a case of the ant going to the sluggard. The immediate result was not industry on the part of the boy. At least, he did not go to hoeing, but ran and jumped into the river. By so doing he was able to combine pleasure with the necessity of getting rid of the ants.

The corn was no sooner in the ground than the crows began to happen around to investigate. They would pull it even after it had grown an inch or two high and snap off the kernel at the roots, and it seemed sometimes as if they rather liked the flavor of the tar put on to destroy their appetite. The boy's indignation waxed high, and he wished he had a gun or a pistol, or something, "to fix those old crows." His mother did not like firearms. She was afraid he would shoot himself; but she gave him some old clothes, and he went off to the shop to contrive a scarecrow and stuff it with hay. When his father appeared and pretended to be frightened by the scarecrow's terrible figure, the boy was quite elated. After supper he and his mother and the smaller children went out in the field and set the man up, and the boy shook hands with him and held a little conversation with the dummy figure. His small brothers and sisters were sure the crows wouldn't "dast" to come around there any more, and they were kind of afraid of the scarecrow themselves.

The days waxed hotter and hotter as the season advanced, and the boy presently got down to the simplest elements in the clothing line. Indeed, if his folks did not insist on something more elaborate, he went about entirely content in a shirt and a pair of overalls.

Going somewhere

His hair was apt to grow rather long between the cuttings his mother gave it. He would not have had it cut at all, if she had not insisted, for he did not enjoy the process. Very likely he was comfortably reading a paper when she disturbed his serenity by saying, "Come, Frank, now I'll tend to your head."

At the same time she got a comb and shears and put on her spectacles. "Don't want my hair cut," said Frank, "It's all right. You're cuttin' it 'most every week."

"I ain't cut it for two months," his mother declared; "so come here."

Frank reluctantly settled into the chair his mother had placed for him, and she took off her apron and pinned it bottom upward around his neck. "Stop pokin' your fingers through that hole," says she, "and lean your head forward a little."

She started clipping. "Ow!" exclaimed Frank, suddenly crouching away from his barber.

"What are you twitching like that for?" she asked somewhat irritably.

"You pull," was Frank's reply.

"Well, I'm just as careful as I know how to be," she retorted.

"I wouldn't care if you only would get hold of a whole bunch and pull," explained Frank; "but you just pull two or three hairs."

"I guess the shears are kind o' dull," suggested his mother. "I don't see what makes your hair stand up so on top at the back. Must be you don't brush it except in front."

"Well, I can't see 'way back there," responded Frank.

"I think I'll have to soap it," remarked his mother.

"Oh, don't," begged Frank.

"Why, you don't want it standing up that way all your life," said his mother. "What'll the girls think of you?"

"I don't care nothin' about the girls," Frank affirmed.

"Well," said she, "I can't have you goin' round lookin' like a little Indian ready to be scalped."

So the conversation ran on until the ordeal come to an end. In the course of time, as the boy grew older, he looked up an uncle or a cousin who was an adept in the hair-cutting line, and got a tight clip that left him as bald as the most ancient of his living ancestors. He felt delightfully cool, anyway, and looks didn't count much with him at that age.

As soon as the first ploughing was done in the spring, the onions were sowed. Their little green needles soon prickled up through the ground, and within a few days they had the company of a multitude of weeds, which must be hoed and pulled out. One thing the boy never quite got to understand was the curious fact that weeds, at first start, will grow twice as fast as any useful crop. He wished weeds had some value. All you would have to do would be to let them grow. They would take care of themselves.

In the case of the onions the hoeing out part was not very bad, but when he got down on his hands and knees to scratch the weeds out of the rows with his fingers, his trouble began. The boy said his back ached. His father

Companions

comforted him by telling him that he guessed not — that he was too young to have the backache — that he'd better wait till he was fifty or sixty, and his joints got stiff and he had the rheumatism; then he would have something to talk about.

But the boy knew very well that his back did ache, and the sun was as hot again as it was when he was standing up, and his head felt as if it were going to drop off. He rose once in a while to stretch, and to see if there were any signs of his mother's wanting him at the house, or hens around that ought to be chased off, or anything else going on that would give him a chance for a change. He bent to his work again presently, and tried various changes from the plain stoop, such as one knee down and the other raised to support his chest, or a sit-down and an

Weeding onions

attempt to weed backward. When left to himself he took long rests at the ends of the rows, lying in the grass on his back under the shadow of an apple tree, or he got

thirsty and went into the house for a drink. He was afflicted with thirst a great deal when he was weeding onions, and became cooky-hungry remarkably often, too.

His most agreeable respite while weeding occurred when he discovered that the neighbor's boy had come out and was at work just over the fence. He threw a lump of dirt at him to attract his attention, and then they exchanged "helloes!"

The boys' aches were not so severe afterward — at least, so long as he had the neighbor's boy over the fence to call at. They often stopped and leaned on the dividing fence and compared gardens, and likely enough got to boasting and perhaps quarrelled before they were through. Once our boy put an end to a dispute by standing Ned, the neighbor's boy, on his head in a muddy furrow. Ned, weeping and bedraggled, went off to find our boy's father and complain of what he had suffered at the lad's hands. As for the latter, he was fearful his fate would be by no means pleasant, and he did not dare go home till he had stuffed the rear part of his trousers with grass.

However, his father let him off this time with a few serious remarks on his misconduct, and the boy thought he was perhaps amused by Ned's dismal plight and somewhat gratified that his son had vanquished a boy larger than himself.

When the boy's father went away from home, to be gone all day, he was apt to set the boy a "stent."

Working out his "stent"

"You put into it, now," he says, "and hoe those eighteen rows of corn, and then you can play the rest of the day."

The boy was inclined to be dubious when he contemplated his task. He didn't think he could get it done in the whole day. But he made a start, and concluded

it was not so bad, after all. He kept at work with considerable perseverance, and only stopped to sit on the fence for a little while at the end of every other row, and once to go up the lane to pick a few raspberries that had turned almost black. As the rows dwindled he became increasingly exuberant, and whistled all through the last one. When that was done, and he put the hoe over his shoulder and marched home, he had not a care in the world.

He had made up his mind early in the day that he would go fishing when he was free, and now he dug some worms back of the shop, brought out his pole, and hunted up his best friend. The best friend was watering tobacco. He could not leave just then, but if Frank would help him for about fifteen minutes, he would have that job done and would go with him.

The boys made the water fly, and it was not long before they and their poles and their tin bait-box were at the riverside. The water just dimpled in the light breeze. The warm afternoon sunlight shone in the boys' faces and glittered on the ripples. They concluded, after a while, that it was not a good afternoon for fishing, and thought wading would prove more profitable. As a result, they got their "pants" wet and their jackets spattered, though where all that water came from they couldn't make out. They thought they had been careful. They

were afraid their mothers would make some unpleasant remarks when they reached home. It seemed best they should roll down their trousers and give them a chance to dry a little before they had to leave. Meanwhile they did not suffer for lack of amusement, for they found a lot of rubbish to throw into the water, and some flat stones to

They wet their "pants"

skip, and some lucky-bugs to catch, and lastly Charlie Thompson's spotted dog showed himself on the bank,

A faithful follower

and they enticed him down to the shore and took to wading again, and had great fun, and got wetter than ever.

As they walked home, Frank said, "Let's go fishing again, some day," and Richard agreed without any hesitation.

They caught not even a shiner this time, but on some occasions they brought home a perch or two and a bullhead and a sucker, strung on a willow twig. Rainy days were those on which they were freest to go fishing, and on such days the fish were supposed to bite best. The boy

seemed perfectly willing at almost any time to don an old coat and an old felt hat and spend a whole drizzling morning slopping along the muddy margin of the river. No one could accuse him of being overfastidious.

One time that Frank and Richard went fishing they were accompanied by the latter's older brother Nathan who was at home from college for his summer vacation. Nathan had that day received a book he very much wanted to read, and it was only when the other two said they would do the fishing and leave him to peruse the book undisturbed that he consented to go along. He sat down under the willows a little back from the water's edge, and the boys tossed in their lines.

"Frank," said Richard, "what kind of fish are you going to catch?"

"I don't know," responded Frank. "What kind are you?"

"Oh, some real big kind," said Richard. "Say, Nathan, what kind of fish would you catch?"

"I wouldn't worry about that," replied Nathan. "Catch anything that comes along."

"Yes, but I want some real big kind," was Richard's response, and he was about to make a further appeal to Nathan when he noticed that the bait-can was overturned. "There, Frank, see what you've done," said he. "All the worms are squirmin' away."

Some fun in a boat

The boys dropped their poles, got down on their knees in the mud, and began to pick up the straying worms. "How funny they crawl," remarked Frank. "They stretch out so long and thin you can almost see through 'em, and then they draw up thick again."

"I think we might let this little fellow go," suggested Richard.

"Throw him out to the fish," said Frank.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Richard. "He's my nice little wormy."

"Well, let him go then," responded Frank. "Here, I'll make a path for him with my finger."

"Oh, Frank, you've made the path, right down to the water," said Richard. "He don't want to go down there."

"Perhaps he wants a drink," Frank observed.

"Worms live in the ground, and they don't drink nothin'," declared Richard, wisely. "I'll make a path up this way for him. Now he's goin' it good. Oh, Nathan, he's comin'! — He's comin'!"

"What's that?" asked Nathan, looking up. "Who's coming? I don't see any one."

"It's my wormy," explained Richard. "He's crawlin' right toward you."

Nathan resumed his reading, and presently the boys tired of watching the worm and took up their poles.

"Now, let's catch some fish," said Richard. "Ain't it hot, though? But just see how the cork on your line is bobbing!"

With a mighty jerk Frank flung a little fish at the end of his line far back on the land, nearly hitting Nathan on

Fishing

the head. The young man started up in some alarm, but he soon understood what had happened, and Frank exhibited in triumph the "punkin-seed" he had caught. As Frank prepared to resume fishing, he appealed to

Nathan with the remark that, "Will Barney says you've got to always spit on your bait if you want to catch any fish. Do you think that's so?"

But Nathan replied that he did not know. The boys for a while employed themselves in throwing in their lines and pulling them out with no results. "The fish don't bite much, Nathan," said Frank.

"No, they don't bite any," declared Richard.

"You don't leave your hooks in long enough to give them a chance," Nathan responded.

"I'm tired of holding this old pole," said Frank after a pause. "See, right here near shore are some pollywogs!"

They laid down their poles and gave their entire attention to the pollywogs which they told Nathan looked like "black overcoat buttons with tails to 'em." Richard caught one. "I'd take him home, if I had something to carry him in," he said.

"You might put him in your handkerchief," suggested Frank.

"That's so," said Richard, feeling in his pockets. "But I can't find it. Let me use yours."

Frank, after making an unsuccessful search, responded: "I can't find mine, either. Get Nathan's. He most always has two or three."

"Nathan!" Richard called, "can I use one of your handkerchiefs?"

"Why, if it's very important, I suppose you can," was his reply.

"Yes, it is," declared Richard. "I want to carry home a pollywog in it."

"Well, I guess not," said Nathan. "You'd better keep track of your own handkerchief if you want to use it for such purposes."

"We might empty the bait can and put him in that with water enough for him to swim in," said Frank.

This was what they did, and Richard said he was going to call him "Polly."

Then Frank caught one, and said: "I'm goin' to call mine Woggy. Let me put him in with yours."

Richard was inclined to object, until Frank explained that his comrade's pollywog would be lonesome. They were still playing with the pollywogs when Nathan called to them that it was time to go home.

"Oh, no, not yet," objected the boys; "we want to catch some more fish."

But Nathan would not allow any lingering, and off they marched, carrying their shoes and stockings and poles and the pumpkin seed and the two pollywogs. They felt pretty well satisfied after all. As for Nathan, he had read just eleven pages in his book.

At some period in his career the boy was pretty sure to bring home a live fish in his tin lunch-pail and turn him

loose in the water-tub at the barn; and he might catch a dozen or two minnows in a pool left landlocked by a

Some fun in the shop

fall of the water, and put those in. He would see them chasing around in there, and the old big fish lurking, very solemn, in the darkest depths, and he fed them bits of

bread and worms, and planned for them a very happy and comfortable life till they should be grown up and he was ready to eat them. But they disappeared in time, and there was not one left. The boy had an idea they must have eaten each other, and then one of the cows had swallowed the last one.

In the early summer strawberries were ripe. They were the first berries to come that amounted to anything. You could pick a few wintergreen and partridge berries on the hillsides in spring, but those hardly counted. The boy always knew spots on the farm where the strawberries grew wild, and when, some early morning, he went to pasture with the cows and was late to breakfast, it proved he had been tramping after berries. He had pushed about among the dew-laden tangles of the grass until he was as wet as if he had been in the river, but he was in a glowing triumph on his return over the red clusters he pulled from his half-filled hat to display to the family.

Some farmer in the neighborhood was pretty sure to raise strawberries for market, and paid two cents a quart for picking. If so, the boy could not rest easy till his folks agreed to let him improve this chance to gain pocket-money, which was a thing he never failed to be short of. He would get up at three o'clock in the morning and carry his breakfast with him in order to be on hand in the field with the rest of the children at daybreak. His eager-

Confidences

ness cooled off in a few days, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that the employer would get his youthful help to stick to the work through the season. They had eaten the berries till they were sick of them; they were tired of stooping, and they had earned so much that their longings for wealth were satisfied. They were apt to get to squabbling about rows while picking, and to enliven the work on dull days by "sassing" one another. The proper position for picking is a stooping posture, but when the boy came home you could see by the spotted pattern on the knees and seat of his trousers that he had made some sacrifices to comfort. The proprietor of the berry fields, and all concerned, were glad when they got to the end of the season.

The boy was up so early on those June mornings that he was in time to hear the air full of bird-songs as it would be at no other time through the day. What made the birds so madly happy as soon as the east caught the first tints of the coming sun? The village trees seemed fairly alive with the songsters, and every bird was doing its best to outdo the rest. Most boys had not a very wide acquaintance with the birds, but there were certain of the feathered folk that never failed to interest them. The boy's favorite was pretty sure to be the bobolink — he is such a happy fellow; he reels through the air in such delight over his singing and the sunny weather. How his song

gurgles and glitters! How he swells out his throat! How prettily he balances and sways on the woody stem of some tall meadow flower! He has a beautiful coat of black and white, and the boy wondered at the rusty feathers of his mate, which looked like an entirely different bird. As the season advanced bobolink changed, and not for the better. His handsome coat grew dingy, and he lost his former gayety. He had forgotten almost altogether the notes of his earlier song of tumbling happiness, and croaked harshly as he stuffed himself on the seeds with which the fields now teemed. Ease and high living seemed to have spoiled his character, just as if he had been human. Before summer was done the bobolinks gathered in companies, and wheeled about the fields in little clouds preparatory to migrating. Sometimes the whole flock flew into a big tree, and from amid the foliage came scores of tinkling notes as of many tiny bells jingling. The boy saw no more of the bobolinks till they returned in the spring to again pour forth their overflowing joy on the blossom-scented air of the meadows.

One of the other birds that the boy was familiar with was the lark, a coarse, large bird with two or three white feathers in its tail; but the lark was too sober to interest him much. Then there was the cat-bird, of sleek form and slaty plumage, flitting and mewing among the shadows of the apple-tree boughs. The brisk robin, who

Over the pasture hills to the chestnut trees

always had a scared look and therefore was out of character as a robber, he knew very well. Robin built a rough nest of straws and mud in the crotches of the fruit trees, and he had a habit of crying in sharp notes at sundown, as if he were afraid sorrow was coming to him in some shape. The robin had a carolling song, too, but that the boy was not so sure of separating from the music of the other birds.

He recognized the woodpeckers by their long bills and the way they could trot up and down the tree trunks, wrong-side up, or anyhow. He knew the bluebird by its color and the phœbe by its song. The orioles were not numerous enough for him to have much acquaintance with them, but he was familiar with the dainty nests they swung far out on the tips of the branches of the big shade trees. He saw numbers of little birds, when the cherries ripened and the peapods filled out, that were as bright as glints of golden sunlight. They varied in their tinting and size, but he called them all yellow-birds, and had a poor opinion of them, for he rarely saw them except when they were stealing.

Along the water courses he now and then glimpsed a heavy-headed kingfisher sitting in solemn watchfulness on a limb or making a startling, headlong plunge into a pool. Along shore the sandpipers ran about in a nervous way on their thin legs, always teetering and complaining, and taking fright and flitting away at the least sound.

On the borders of the ponds the boy sometimes came on a crane or a blue heron meditating on one leg up to its knee in water. Off it would go in awkward flight, trailing its long legs behind it. On the ponds, too, the wild ducks alighted in the fall and spring on their journeys south and north. There might be as many as twenty of the compact, glossy-backed creatures in a single flock, but a smaller number was more common. The swallows, on summer days, were to be found skimming over the waters of the streams and ponds, and they made flying dips and twittered and rose and fell and twisted and turned, and seemed very happy. They had holes in a high bank in the vicinity, and if the boy thought he wanted to get a collection of birds' eggs, he armed himself with a trowel, some day, and climbed the steep dirt bank to dig them out. The holes went in about an arm's length, and at the end was a rude little nest, and some white eggs with such tender shells that the boy broke many more than he succeeded in carrying away. He stored such eggs as he gathered from time to time in small wooden or pasteboard boxes, with cotton in the bottoms, until too many of the eggs got broken, when he threw the whole thing away. His interest had been destructive and temporary, and he would much better have studied in a different fashion, or turned his talent to something else.

Several other birds are still to be mentioned that gained

Barn work

his attention. There were the humming birds that buzzed about among the blossoms, inserting their long bills, and they could poise on their misty wings with bodies wonderfully motionless. They had hues of the rainbow in their feathers, and they flashed out of sight across the yard in no time when they saw the boy. The barn and chimney swallows he noticed most at twilight, darting in tangled flights in upper air or skimming low over the fields in twittering alertness. How they worried the old cat as she crouched in the hayfield! Again and again they almost touched her head in their circling, but they were so swift and changeful that the cat had no chance of catching them. Then there was the kingbird which the boy very much admired — he was a vigorous, good-looking fellow, with an admirable antipathy for tyrants and bullies. Size made no difference with him. He put the crow to ungainly flight; he followed the hawk, and the boy could see him high in air darting down at the great bird's back again and again; and he did not even fear the eagle. In corn-planting time the whip-poor-will made the evening air ring with his lonely calls, and the boy sometimes saw his dusky form standing lengthwise of a fence rail just as the bird was about to flit far off across the fields and renew more distantly its whistling cry. The most distressing bird of all was the little screech-owl. Its tremulous and long-drawn wail suggested that

some one human was in the orchard crying out in his last feeble agonies. The boy was scared when he heard the screech-owl.

The great and only holiday of the summer was Fourth of July. The boy very likely did not know or especially care about the philosophic meaning of the day. As he understood it, the occasion was one whose first requirement was lots of noise. To furnish this in plenty, he was willing to begin the day by getting up at midnight to parade the village street with the rest of the boys, and toot horns and set off firecrackers, and liven up the sleepy occupants of the homes by making particular efforts before each dwelling. The serenaders had a care in their operations to be on guard, that they might hasten to a safe distance if any one rushed out to lecture or chastise them; but when everything continued quiet within doors, they would hoot and howl for some time, and even blow up the mail-box with

Fourth of July

a cannon cracker, or commit other mild depredations, to add to the glory of the occasion. When some particularly brilliant brain conceived the idea of getting all the

Setting off a firecracker

boys to take hold of an old mowing machine and gallop it through the dark street in full clatter, it may be supposed that the final touch was given to American independence and liberty.

Not all the boys went roaming around thus, and the older and rougher ones were the leaders. The smaller boys did not enter very heartily into some of the fun, though they dared not openly hang back; and when the stars paled and the first gray approach of dawn began

to lighten the east, the little fellows felt very sleepy and lonely in spite of the company and noise. They were glad enough when, about this time, the band broke up and they could steal away home and to bed. The day itself was enlivened by much popping of firecrackers and torpedoes in farm dooryards — and there was a village picnic, in the afternoon, and a grand setting-off in the evening of pin-wheels, Roman candles, a nigger-chaser, and a rocket. After the rocket had gone up into the sky with its wild whirr and its showering of sparks, and had toppled and burst and burned out into blackness, the day was ended, and the boy retired with the happiness that comes from labor done and duty well performed.

The work of all others that most filled the summer months was haying. In the hill towns where the land is stony and steep, much of it was cut over with scythes, but the majority of New England farmers did nearly all of their grass-cutting with mowing machines. A boy would hardly do much of the actual mowing in either case until he was in his teens; but long before that he was called on to turn the grindstone — an operation that preceded the mowing of each field. He became pretty sick of that grindstone before the summer was through.

He liked to follow after the mowing machine. There was something enlivening in its clatter, and he enjoyed

seeing the grass tumble backward as the darting knives struck their stalks. He did not care so much about following his father when he mowed with a scythe; for then he was expected to carry a fork and spread the swath his father piled up behind him. On the little farms

The grindstone

machines were lacking to a degree, and the boys had to do much of the turning and raking by hand. Finally, they had to borrow a horse to get the hay in. The best-provided farmer usually did some borrowing, and there were those who were running to borrow all the time — that is, they kept the boy running. Boys are made for

running. The boy did not like this job very well, for the lender was too often doubtful in his manner, if not in his words.

Two who have been a-borrowing

On still summer days the hayfield was apt to be a very hot place. The hay itself had a gray glisten, and the low-lying air shimmered with the heat. It was all very well if the boy could ride on the tedder or rake, but it made the perspiration start if he had to do any work by

hand. He did not have to be much of a boy to be called on by his father to rake the scatterings back of the load, and he had to be on the jump all the time to keep up. The boy was pretty well grown before he had the strength to do the pitching on. Whatever he did in the field, his place in the barn was under the roof "mowing away." The place was dusky, and the dust flew, and a cricket or some uncomfortable many-legged creature crawled down his back. It was hot and stifling, and the hay came up about twice as fast as he wanted it to. Before the load

On the hay tedder

was quarter off, he began to listen for the welcome scratch of his father's fork on the wagon rack. That signalled the nearing the bottom of the load. Even after the last forkful was thrown up, he had to creep all around under the eaves to tread the hay more solidly. He was glad enough when he could crawl down the ladder and go into the house and give his head a soak under the pump, and get a drink of water. There was nothing tasted much better than water when he was dry that way, unless it was the sweetened water that they took in a jug right down to the hayfield with them.

I do not wish to give the impression that haying was made up too much of sweat and toil, and that the boy found this period altogether a season of trial and tribulation. The work was not at all bad on cool days, and some boys liked the jumping about on load and mow. There was fun in the jolting, rattling ride on the springless wagon to the hayfield, and when the haycocks in the orchard were rolled up for the night, the boys had great sport turning somersaults over them. Then there were exhilarating occasions when the sky blackened, and from the distant horizon came the flashing and muttering of an approaching thunderstorm. Everybody did his best then; they raced the horses to the field and the hay was rolled up, and forkful after forkful went twinkling up on the load in no time. But the storm was likely to come

The boy rakes after

before they were done. There was a spattering of great drops, that gave warning, and a dash of cold wind, and everybody — teams and all — would race helter-skelter to the barns. They were in luck if they got there before the whole air was filled with the flying drops. It was a pleasurable excitement, anyway, and the boy felt very comfortable, in spite of his wet clothes, as he sat on the meal-chest talking with the others, listening to the rolling thunder and the rain rattling on the roof and splashing into the yard from the eaves-spout. He looked out of the big barn doors into the sheeted rain that veiled the fields with its hurrying mists, and saw its half-glooms lit up now and then by the pallid flashes of the lightning.

Presently came a burst of sunlight, the rain ceased, and as the storm receded a rainbow arched its shredded tatters. All Nature glittered and dripped and tinkled. The trees and fields had the freshness of spring, and the tips of every leaf and every blade of grass twinkled with diamond drops of water. The boy ran out with a shout to the roadside puddles. The chickens left the shelter of the sheds, and rejoiced in the number of worms crawling about the hard-packed earth of the dooryard, and all kinds of birds began singing in jubilee.

But whatever incidental pleasures there might be in haying, it was generally considered a season of uncommonly hard work, and at its end the farm family thought

itself entitled to a picnic and a season of milder labor. The picnic idea usually developed into a plan to go for a whole day to some resort of picnickers, where you had to pay twenty-five cents for admission — children half price. Of course, there were all sorts of ways that you

Discussing the colt

could spend a good deal more than that at these places, but it was mostly the young men, who felt called on to demonstrate their fondness for the girls they had brought with them, who patronized the extras. The farm family was economical. They carried feed for their horses and a big lunch-basket packed full for themselves, and

simply indulged in all the things that were free; though Johnny and Tommy were allowed to draw on their meagre supply of pocket-money to the extent of five cents each for candy. There were swings to swing in and tables to eat on in a grove, and, if the spot was by a lake or river, there were boats to row in and fish to catch, only you couldn't catch them. Meanwhile the horses were tied conveniently in the woods, and spent the day kicking and switching at the flies that happened around.

Toward evening the wagon was backed about and loaded up, the horses hitched into it, and everybody piled in and noses were counted, and off they went homeward. The sun set, the bright skies faded, and the stars sparkled out one by one and looked down on them as the horses jogged along the glooms of the half-wooded, unfamiliar roadways. Some of the children got down under the seats and crooned in a shaking gurgle as the wagon jolted their voices; and they shut their eyes and fancied the vehicle was going backward — oh, so swiftly! Then they opened their eyes, and there were the tree leaves fluttering overhead and the deep night sky above, and they saw they were going on, after all. When they neared home they all sat up on the seats once more and watched for familiar objects along the road. At last the house was close at hand; the horses turned into the yard; the family climbed out of the wagon, and in a few

minutes a lamp was lighted in the kitchen. A neighbor had milked the cows. The children were so tired they could hardly keep their eyes open, but they must have a slice of bread and butter all around, and a piece of pie. Then, tired but happy, they bundled off to bed.

Not every excursion of this kind was to a public pleasure resort. Sometimes the family went after huckleberries or blackberries, or for a day's visit to relatives who lived in a neighboring town, or to see a circus parade at the county seat. The family vehicle was apt to be the high, two-seated spring wagon. It was not particularly handsome to look at, but I fancy it held more happiness than the gilded cars with their gaudy occupants that they saw pass in the parade.

The strawberries were the first heralds of a summer full of good things to eat. The boy began sampling each fruit in turn as soon as it showed signs of ripening, and on farms where children were numerous and fruits were not, very few things ever got ripe. You would not have thought to look at him that a small boy could eat so much as he contrived to stow away. He would be chewing on something all the morning, and have just as good an appetite for dinner as ever. In the afternoon he would eat seventeen green apples, and be on hand for supper as lively as a cricket. Still, at times he repented his eating indiscretions in sackcloth and ashes. There

Green apple medicine

was a point in the green-apple line beyond which even the small boy could not safely go. The twisting pains gripped his stomach, and he had to go to his mother and get her to do something to keep him in the land of the living. He repented of all his misdeeds while the pain was

on him, just as he would in a thunderstorm in the night that waked and scared him; and he said his prayers, and hoped, after all, if these were his last days, he had not been so bad but that he would go to the good place. When he grew better, however, he forgot his pain and the vows he had made to be a better boy, and he did some more things to repent of. But that is not peculiarly a boyish trait. Grown-up people do that.

IV

AUTUMN

BY September there began to be dashes of color among the upland trees. This color appeared first in some weakling bush, so poorly nourished, or by chance injured, that it must shorten its year and burn out thus early its meagre foliage; but as soon as these pale flames are seen among the greens, you know that the year has passed its prime.

Grown people may experience a touch of melancholy with the approach of autumn. The years fly fast — another of those allotted to them is almost gone; the brightening foliage is a presage of bare twigs, of frost and frozen earth, and the gales and snows of winter. This was not the boy's view. He was not retrospective; his interests were bound up in the present and the future. There was a good deal of unconscious wisdom in his mental attitude. He looked forward, whatever the time of year, with unflagging enthusiasm to the days approaching, and he rejoiced in all he saw and experienced, and did not worry himself with allegories.

The bright-leaved tree at the end of summer was a

matter of interest both for its brightness and its unexpectedness. The boy picked a branch and took it home to show to his mother, and the next day he carried it to school

A mud turtle

and gave it to the teacher. He would have been glad to share all the good things of life that came to him with his teacher. Next to his mother, she was the best person he knew of. He never found anything in his wanderings about home or in the fields or woods that was curious or

beautiful or eatable but that the thought of the teacher flashed into his mind. His intentions were better than his ability to carry them out, for he often forgot himself, and on the way home ate all the berries he had picked, or he got tired and threw away the treasures he had gathered. But what he did take to the teacher was sure of a welcome and an interest that made him happy, and more her faithful follower than ever.

Summer merges so gently into autumn that it is difficult to tell where to draw the line of separation. September, as a rule, is a month of mild days mingled with some that have all the heat of midsummer; but the nights are cooler, and at times the dew felt icy cold to the boy's bare feet on his morning trips to and from pasture.

The meadows were now being clipped of their second crop of grass; the potato tops had withered and lost themselves in the motley masses of green weeds that continued to flourish after the potatoes themselves had ripened; the loaded apple trees drooped their branches and sprinkled the earth with early fallen fruit; the coarse grasses and woody creepers along the fences turned russet and crimson, and the garden became increasingly ragged and forlorn.

The garden reached its fulness and began to go to pieces in July. First among its summer treasures came lettuce and radishes, then peas and sweet corn and string

beans and early potatoes. The boy had a great deal more to do with these things than he liked, for the gather-

Picking blackberries

ing of them was among those small jobs it was so handy to call on him to do. However, he got not a little consolation out of it by eating of the things he gathered.

Raw string beans were not at all bad, and a pod full of peas made a pleasant and juicy mouthful, while a small ear of sweet corn or a stalk of rhubarb or an onion, and even a cucumber, could be used to vary the bill of fare. Along one side of the garden was a row of currant bushes. He was supposed to let those mostly alone, as his mother had warned him she wanted them for "jelly." But he did not interpret her warning so literally but that he allowed himself to rejoice his palate with an occasional full cluster. It was when the tomatoes ripened that the garden reached the top notch in its offering of raw delicacies. Those red, full-skinned trophies fairly melted in the boy's mouth. He liked them better than green apples.

Potato-bugging

The potatoes were the hardest things to manage of all the garden vegetables which he was sent out to get for dinner. His folks had an idea that you could dig into the sides

of the hills and pull out the big potatoes, and then cover up and let the rest keep on growing; but when the boy tried this and finished with a hill, he had to acknowledge that it did not look as if it would ever amount to much afterward.

The sweet-corn stalks from which the ears were picked had to be cut from time to time and fed to the cows. It was this thinning out of the corn, as much as the withering of the pea and cucumber vines and irregular digging of the potatoes, that gave the garden its early forlornness.

By August the pasture grass had been cropped short by the cows, and the drier slopes had withered into brown. Thenceforth it was deemed necessary to furnish the cows extra feed from other sources of supply. The farmer would mow with his scythe, on many evenings, in the nooks and corners about his buildings or along the roadside and in the lanes, and the results of these small mowings were left for the boy to bring in on his wheelbarrow.

Another source of fodder supply was the field of Indian corn. Around the bases of the hills there sprouted many surplus shoots a foot or two in length known as "suckers." These were of no earthly use where they were, and the boy on a small farm often had the privilege, toward evening, of cutting a load of the suckers for the cows. Among them he gathered a good many full-grown stalks that had no ears on them. Possibly there was

A voyage on a log

a patch of fodder corn sown in rows on some piece of late-ploughed ground, and a part of the time he might gather from that. He had to bring in as heavy a load as he could wheel every night, and on Saturday an extra one to last over Sunday.

The cows had to have special attention from the boy one way or another the year through. They were most aggravating, perhaps, when in September the shortness

of feed in the pasture made them covetous of the contents of the adjoining fields. Sometimes the boy would sight them in the corn. His first great anxiety was not about the corn, but as to whether they were his folks' cows or belonged to the neighbors. He would much rather warn some one else than undertake the cow-chasing himself. If his study of the color and spotting of the cows proved they were his, he went in and told his mother, then got his stick and took a bee-line across the fields. He was wrathfully inclined when he started, and he became still more so when he found how much disposed the cows were to keep tearing around in the corn or to race about the fields in as many different directions as there were animals. He and the rest of the school had lately become members of the Band of Mercy, and on ordinary occasions he had a kindly feeling for his cows; but now he was ready to throw all sentiment aside, and he would break his stick over the back of any one of the cows if she would give him the chance, which she very unkindly would not. He had lost his temper, and presently he lost his breath, and he just dripped with perspiration. He dragged himself a'ong at a panting walk, and he found, after all, that this did fully as well as all the racing and shouting he had been indulging in. Indeed, he was not sure but the cows had got the notion that he had come out to have a little

caper over the farm with them for his personal enjoyment.

All things have an end, and in time the boy made the last cow leap the gap in the broken fence back into the pasture. Then every one of them went to browsing as if nothing had happened, or looked at him mildly with an

A corner of the sheep yard

inquiring forward tilt of the ears, as if they wanted to know what all this row was about, anyway. The boy replaced the knocked-down rails, staked things up as well as he knew how, picked some peppermint by the brook to

munch, and trudged off home. When he had drunk a quart or so of water and eaten three cookies, he began to feel that he was himself again.

Besides all the extra foddering mentioned, it was customary on the small farms to give the cows, late in the year, an hour or two's baiting each day. The cows were baited along the roadside at first, but after the rowen was cut, they were allowed to roam about the grass fields. Of course, it was the boy who had to watch them. There

Shooting with a "sling"

Meditations by a streamside

were unfenced crops and the apples that lay thick under the trees to be guarded, not to mention the turnips in the newly seeded lot, and the cabbages on the hill that would spoil the milk if the cows ate any of them. Then, too, the boundary-line fences were out of repair, and the cows seemed to have a great anxiety to get over on the neighbors' premises, even if the grass was much scantier than in the field where they were feeding. The boy brought out a book, and settled himself with his back against a fence post and planned for an easy time. The cows seemed to understand the situation, and they went exploring round, as the boy said, "in the most insensible fashion he ever saw — wouldn't keep nowhere, nor anywhere else." He tried to make them stay within bounds by yelling at them while sitting still, but they did not appear to care the least bit about his remarks unless he was right behind them with a stick in his hand. The cows did not allow the boy to suffer for lack of exercise, and the hero in the book he was reading had continually to be deserted in the most desperate situations while he ran off to give those cows a training.

There was one of the cow's relations that the boy had a particular fondness for — I mean the calf. On small farms the lone summer calf was tethered handily somewhere about the premises. Every day or two, when it had nibbled and trodden the circuit of grass

within reach pretty thoroughly, it was moved to a fresh spot. The boy did this, and he fed the calf its milk each night and morning. If the calf was very young, it did not know enough to drink, and the boy had to dip his fingers in the milk and let the calf suck them while he enticed it, by gradually lowering his hand, to put its nose in the pail. When he had his hand in the milk and the calf imagined it was getting lots of milk out of the boy's fingers, he would gently withdraw them. The calf was inclined to resent this by giving a vigorous bunt with its head. Very likely the

At the barn door

boy got slopped, but he knew what to expect well enough not to allow himself to be sent sprawling. He repeated the finger process until in time the calf would drink alone, but he never could get it to stop bunting. Indeed, he did not try very hard, except occasionally, for

Watching work at the sawmill

he found it rather entertaining, and sometimes he did not object to butting his own head against the calf's.

Things became most exciting when the calf got loose. It would go galloping all about the premises, showing no regard for the garden, or the flower plants, or the towels laid out on the grass to dry. It made the chickens squawk and scamper, and the turkeys gobble and the geese gabble.

Its heels went kicking through the air in all sorts of positions, its tail was elevated like a flag pole, and there was a rattling chain hitched to its neck that was jerking along in its company. The calf was liable to step on this chain, and then it stood on its head with marvellous suddenness. The women and girls all came out to save their linen and "shoo" the calf off when it approached the flowers, but it was the boy who took on himself the task of capturing the crazy animal. The women folks seemed much distressed by the calf's performances, while the boy was so overcome with the funniness of his calf that he was only halfway effective in the chasing.

At last the calf apparently saw something it never noted before; for it stopped stock still and stretched its ears forward as if in great amazement. Now was the boy's chance. He stole up and grabbed the end of the chain; but at that moment the calf concluded it saw nothing worthy of astonishment, and started off again full tilt, trailing a small boy behind, whose twinkling legs never went so fast before. It was a question if things were not in a more desperate state than they were previously. By this time the boy's father and a few of the neighbors' boys appeared on the scene, and between them all the calf got confused, and allowed itself to be tethered once more in the most docile subjection. You would not have thought the gentle little creature, which

Leap-frog

was so mildly nibbling off the clover leaves, was capable of such wild doings.

On farms where oxen were used the boy was allowed to train a pair of steers. While the training was going on, the boy could be heard shouting out his threats and commands from one end of the town to the other. Even old Grandpa Smith, who had been deaf as a stone these ten years, asked what the noise was about when our boy began training steers. By dint of his shoutings and whackings it was no great time before the boy had the steers so that they were quite respectable. They would turn and twist according to his directions almost any way, and he could make them snake the clumsy

old cart he hitched them into over any sort of country he pleased. He trained them so they would trot quite well, too. All together, he was proud of them, and believed they would beat any other steers in the county clean out of sight. He was going to take them to the cattle-show some time and see if they would not.

Out with the steers

Cattle-show came in the autumn, usually about the time of the first frosts. There was some early rising among the farmers on the morning of the great day, for they must get their flocks and herds under way promptly or they would be late. Every kind of farm creature had its place on the grounds; and in the big hall were displayed quantities of fruits and vegetables that were the biggest and best ever seen, and samples of cooking

Apple juice

and samples of sewing, and a bedquilt an old lady made after she was ninety years old, that had about a million pieces in it; and another one made by Ann Maria Totkins who was only ten years old, and that had about nine hundred thousand pieces in it; and a picture in oils this same Ann Maria Totkins had painted; and some other paintings, and lots of fancy things, and all sorts of remarkable work that women and girls could do and a boy wasn't good for anything at. However, the boy admired all this handicraft, and he was astonished at the big squash that grew in one summer and weighed twice as much as he did. He surveyed the fruits with watery mouth, and exclaimed when he got to the potatoes, any one of which would almost fill a quart measure, "Jiminy! wouldn't those be the fellers to pick up, though?"

"I don't think you use very nice language," said the boy's older sister, who was nearly through the high school.

"Well, you don't know much about picking up potatoes," was his retort.

There were more chances to spend money on the cattle-show grounds than you could "shake a stick at." All sorts of men were walking around through the crowd with popcorn and candies, and gay little balloons and whistles and such things to sell, and there were booths where you could see how much you could pound, and

how much you could lift, and how straight you could throw a ball at a "nigger's" head stuck through a sheet of canvas fastened to posts two rods away. There were shooting galleries, and there was a phonograph, where you tucked some little tubes into your ears and could hear the famous baritone, Augustus William de Monk, sing the latest songs, and the experience was so funny you could not help laughing. Of course, the boy could not invest in all the things he saw at the fair; he had to stop when his pocket-money was exhausted. But there was lots of free fun, such as the chance to roam

The crowd at cattle-show

around and look on at everything, and he had quantities of handbills and brightly colored cards and pamphlets thrust on him, all of which he faithfully stowed away in his gradually bulging pockets and took home to consider at leisure. For a number of days afterward he made melody wherever he went with his whistles and jew's-harps and other noise-makers purchased at the fair; but these things were soon broken, and the pamphlets and circulars he gathered got scattered, and the cattle-show may be said to have been brought to an end by his finding, two Sundays later, a lone peanut in his jacket pocket. He was in church at the time, and he was at great pains to crack the peanut quietly, so that he could eat it at once. He succeeded, though he had to assume great innocence and a remarkably steadfast interest in the preacher when his mother glanced his way suspiciously as she heard the shuck crush.

Autumn was a season of harvest. The potato field had first attention. When the boy's father was otherwise busied, he had to go out alone and do digging and all, unless he could persuade his smaller brothers and sisters to bring along their little express wagon and assist. In such a case he spent about half his time showing them how, and offering inducements to keep them at work. Usually it was the men folks who dug, and the boy had to do most of the picking up. After he had handled

about five bushels of the dirty things, he thought he had done enough; but he could not desert. It was one of the great virtues of farm life that the boy must learn to do disagreeable tasks, and to stick to them to the finish, however irksome they were. This gave the right kind

Paring apples

of boy a decided advantage in the battles of life that came later, whatever his field of industry. He had acquired courage to undertake and persistence to carry out plans that boys of milder experience would never dare to cope with.

Potato fields that had been neglected in the drive of other work in their ripening weeks, flourished often

at digging time with many weedy jungles. This made digging slow, but the economical small farmer saw some gain in the fact, for he could feed the weeds to the pigs. After the midday digging, while the boy's father was carrying the bags of potatoes down cellar, the boy wheeled in a few loads of the weeds. The pigs were very glad to come wallowing up from the barnyard mire to the bars where the boy threw the weeds over. They grunted and crunched with great satisfaction. When the boy brought in the last load, he had a little conversation with the pigs, and he scratched the fattest one's back with a piece of board, until the stout porker lay down on its side and curled up the corners of its mouth and grunted as if in the seventh heaven of bliss.

A little later in the fall the onions had to be topped, the beets pulled, the carrots spaded out, and the corn cut. Work at the corn, in one shape or another, hung on until snow flew. The men did most of the cutting and binding, though the boy often assisted; but what he was sure to do was to drop the straw and to hand up the bundles when they were ready for stacking, and gather the scattered pumpkins and put them under the stacks to protect them from the frost. He liked to play that these stacks were Indian tents, and he would crowd himself in among their slanting stalks till he was out of sight. He picked out two good-sized green pumpkins

Bringing in a Pumpkin

that night from among those they had brought home to feed to the cows, and hollowed them out and cut awful faces on them for Jack-o'-lanterns. He fixed with considerable trouble a place in the bottom for a candle,

and got the younger children to come out on the steps while he lighted up. They were filled with delight and fear by the ghostly heads with their strangely glowing features and their grinning, saw-toothed mouths. The boy went running around the yard with them, and put them on fence posts and carried them up a ladder, and cut up all sorts of antics with them. Finally, the younger children were called in, and the boy got lonesome and blew out his candles, and stowed the Jack-o'-lanterns away for another occasion.

On days following there was much corn-husking in the fields, at which the boy assisted, though the break-

The boy helps husk

ing off of the tough cobs was often no easy matter, and it made his wrists and fingers ache. Toward sundown the farmer frequently brought home a load to husk in the evening, or for employment on the morrow, should the day chance to be rainy. During the autumn it was quite common to do an hour or two's work in the barn of an evening, though the boy did not fancy the arrangement much, and begged off when he could think of a good excuse.

In October the apples had to be picked. The pickers went to the orchard armed with baskets, ropes, and ladders, and the wagon brought out a load of barrels and scattered them among the trees. It looked dangerous the way the boy would worm about among the branches and pursue the apples out to the tips of the smallest limbs. He never fell, though he many times came near doing so. The way he hung on seemed to confirm the truth of the theory that he was descended from monkey ancestors. But the boy was on the ground much of the time, emptying the baskets the men let down into the barrels and picking up the best of the windfalls, and gathering the rest of the apples on the ground into heaps for cider.

It was a treat to take the cider apples to mill. There was sure to be something going on in the mill vicinity — always other teams and other boys, and there were great

bins of waiting apples and creaking machinery, and an atmosphere full of cidery odors. The boy lost no time in hunting up a good straw and finding a newly filled barrel with the bung out. He established prompt connections with the cider by means of the straw, and loaded

Afloat

himself up with sweetness. When he had drunk enough, and had wiped his mouth with his sleeve, he remarked that he guessed he had lowered that cider some. After they brought their own cider home and propped up the barrels in the yard by the shop, the boy kept a bunch of straws conveniently stored, and as long as he called the cider sweet he frequently drew on the barrels' con-

tents. When the cider grew hard he took to visiting the apple bins more frequently, and, if you noticed him closely, you would nearly always see that he had bunches in his pockets that showed he was well provided with these food stores.

The great day of the fall for the boy was that on which he and several of the other fellows went chestnutting. They had been planning the expedition and talking it over for a week beforehand. The sun had not been long up when they started off across the frosty quiet of the pastures. Some had tin pails, some had bags, some had both. One boy's hopes soared so high that he carried three bags with a capacity of a half bushel each. Most of them had salt bags that would contain two or three quarts. Two of the lads carried clubs to knock off the chestnuts that still clung in the burs. They were all in eager chatter as they tramped and skipped and climbed the fences and rolled stones down the hillside and whirled their pails about their heads, and waited for the smallest boy, who was getting left behind, to catch up, and did all those other things that boys do when they are off that way. How they raced to be first when they neared the chestnut trees! There was a scattering, and a shouting over finds, and a rustling among the fallen leaves. The nuts were not so numerous that it took them long to clear the ground. Then they threw

their clubs, but the limbs were too high for their strength to be effective, and they soon gave that up and went on to find more trees. The chestnuts rattled on the bottoms of their tin pails, and the boys with bags twisted them up and exhibited to each other the knob of nuts within.

As the sun rose higher the grass became wet with melted frost, and the wind began to blow in dashing little breezes that kept increasing in force till the whole wood was set to singing and fluttering. The boys enjoyed the briskness of the gale, and agreed, besides, that it would bring down the chestnuts. They wandered on over knolls and through hollows, sometimes in the brown pastures, sometimes in the ragged, autumn forest patches. They clubbed and climbed and picked, and bruised their shins, and got chestnut-bur prickles into their fingers, and they squabbled some among themselves, and the smallest boy tumbled and had the nose-bleed and shed tears, and it took the whole company to comfort him. On the whole, though, they got on very well.

Presently the biggest boy, who had a watch, told them it was twelve o'clock, and they stopped on the sunny side of a pine grove, where there was a brook that slipped down over some rocks near by, and ate their dinner. The breeze was swaying the pine-tops, in

a weird sighing melody, and now and then a tiny whirlwind caught up the leaves beyond the brook and dashed them into a white-birch thicket. In the sheltered nook where the boys sat the wind barely touched them, and they ate, and drank from the brook, and lounged about afterward in great comfort. Later, they followed the little stream down a rough ravine, and the afternoon experiences were much the same as those of the morning. They saw two gray squirrels, they heard a hound baying on the mountain, and there was a gun fired off somewhere in the woods. They found a crow's nest, only it was so high in a tree that they could not get it, and they picked up many pretty stones by the side of the brook and put them in with their chestnuts. They stopped under one tree that was in sight of an orchard where a man was picking apples. The man hallooed to them to "get out of there!" and after a little hesitation — for the spot was a promising one — they straggled off into the woods again.

While they travelled they did a good deal of desultory eating. They made way with an occasional chestnut, and they found birch and mountain mint, and dug some sassafras root, which they ate after getting most of the dirt off. The biggest boy's name was Ed Cook, and he would eat almost anything. He would eat acorns, which the rest found too bitter, and he would chew pine and hemlock

needles and sweet-fern leaves, and all such things. He took his knife, as they were crossing a pasture, and cut a plug of bark from a pine tree and scraped out the pitch and juice next to the wood, and said it was sweet. The others tried it, and it was sweet, though they did not care much for it.

In the late afternoon the squad of boys came out on a precipice of rocks that overhung a pond. The wind

Out for a tramp

had gone down and the sun was getting low, and it seemed best that they should start homeward. They were back among the scattered houses of the village just as the evening had begun to get dusky and frosty. The smallest

boy had more than a pint of chestnuts, and the biggest boy had as many as three quarts, not counting stones and other rubbish. The day had been a great success, but they felt as if they had trudged a thousand miles,

Late to supper

and were almost too tired to eat supper. However, when the boy began to tell his adventures, and set forth in glowing terms his triumphs and trials, and listed the wonderful things he had seen, his spirits revived, and in the evening he was able to superintend the boiling of a cup of the chestnuts he had gathered, and to do his share of the eating.

When the chestnut burs opened, autumn was at its

height. Now it began to decline. Every breeze set loose relays of the gaudy leaves and sent them fluttering to the earth in a many-tinted shower, and the bare twigs and the increasing sharpness of the morning frosts warned the farm dwellers that winter was fast approaching.

V

COUNTRY CHILDREN IN GENERAL

IN this final chapter I propose to gather up some of the loose threads of my narrative that for one reason or another have missed attention in the earlier chapters. In particular, I wish to tell something of the farmer's girls. The average boy had a somewhat scornful opinion of them, until he arrived at the age of sixteen or seventeen. Then their importance became quite superlative, if one could judge from the amount of attention he gave them.

A little housekeeper

The small girl's likes and dislikes, her enthusiasms and pleasures, were to a large degree identical with the boy's. She could beat him half the time in the races that they ran. If she had rubber boots, she was just as good a

wader. She could play ball, climb fences, slide down hill, skate — indeed, do almost anything the boy could, with

A game of croquet

just the same interest and enjoyment. The girl was often a leader in roaming and adventure, and some girls made excellent outdoor workers, too. A lively and capable girl often wished that she was a boy, so that she might have the boy's outdoor freedom; and sometimes, too, she envied his opportunity to cope with vigorous work and win a name and place in the world. At any rate, she longed to slip away from the confining housework and more sober demeanor which she was expected to have.

On farms where boys were lacking, the girls sometimes, of necessity, did the boys' work. They drove the cows

to pasture, helped in hoeing and weeding, loaded the hay, and picked up potatoes. But usually they only hovered around the edges of the outdoor work. They took care of a corner in the garden and a strip of flower-bed, fed the chickens, went on errands, and helped pick apples. The smallest girls, unless their folks were uncommonly particular, ran around very much as they pleased, and dipped into as many different kinds of work as they chose, and they got just as smutty and dirty as any of the boys. When the girls were old enough to don long dresses, they became more and more particular as to what they were seen doing about the fields, and they avoided anything but the lightest muscular exertion, and not all of them even dared to make a spectacle of themselves by riding around on the horse-rake and tedder.

The girl was early taught to wash and wipe the dishes, to sweep, to mend rents and sew on buttons. The boy had to acknowledge that in these things his sister beat him. She could do every one of them quicker and better than he could, though he claimed that the buttons she sewed on would come off, and that, give him time enough, he could sew a button on so he could depend on that button's staying where it was put to his last days. It was certain, too, that the girl was apt to be quicker with her mind than the boy. She had her lessons more perfect in school, and she was more docile in her behavior. Often she was the

boy's helper and adviser in all sorts of difficulties and troubles. We all crave a sympathetic understanding and interest in our doings. It is the mothers and sisters who are most likely to respond in such ways, and it was to them that the boy went most freely with his woes and pleasures.

A chat with grandpa

They were far safer confidants than the rest of the world, and the boy was likely to have reason for sorrow in later life because he did not follow their wishes and advice more closely.

All kinds of boys were to be found on our New England farms — good and bad, handsome and homely, bright and

dull, strong and weak, courageous and timid, generous and mean. I think the better qualities predominated. The typical boy was a sturdy, wholesome-looking little fellow, with chubby cheeks that were well tanned and freckled in summer, and that in the winter took a rosy glow from the keenness of the air. The same was more mildly true of the appearance of the little girls, and with some advantages in their favor. You take a group of country girls some June morning, on their way to school, with their fresh faces and clean, starched aprons — they looked, as Artemus Ward has said, "nice enough to eat without sass or seasonin'."

As the children grew up they were apt to lose much of their simplicity and attraction. They became self-conscious and in many ways artificial, particularly in their manner and in their pleasures. This artificiality was not especially apparent in their work, and there were those who continued to a large degree refreshingly earnest and natural in whatever they did; and country life all through, with its general habits of labor and economy and its comparative seclusion, was less artificial than that of the cities. Yet there were the same tendencies in both places. The girl became increasingly anxious about the mode of her dress — she wanted to have all the latest puckers of the world of fashion. She twisted and cut off and curled and frizzed her hair, and she braided it and

Studying his Sunday-school lesson

rolled it and made it stand on end in her effort to find the adjustment most becoming to her style of beauty. The result sometimes was that she had the appearance of having gone crazy. She wore toothpick-toed, high-heeled shoes, and declared publicly that they couldn't be more comfortable, while privately she complained of corns. For society use she cultivated a cultured tone of voice and some tosses of the head, rolling up of the eyeballs, shrugging of the shoulders, etc., calculated to be "killing." She had an idea that it was becoming in her to appear to take fright easily, and she screeched at sudden noises, and was in a panic at the appearance of the most scared and tiny of mice.

A good deal of this sort of performing was done for its effect on the boys. It seemed to interest and entertain them, and keep them hanging around. The girls sentimentalized a good deal about the boys when they got into their teens. They kept track of who was going with who, and, in their shallow way, picked his looks and characteristics all to ravellings. What a fellow said, how he curled his mustache, how he parted his hair, how horridly or how well he danced, how late it was when he got home from the last party, etc., were discussed at all kinds of times and places. Two girls who had come home from meeting together some cold autumn night would loiter and freeze to death at the gate where they were to part, talking for

Weeding the posy bed

an hour or more over the "fellows" after this manner. The result was that their minds came into a state where subjects without a gossipy or sentimental turn had no interest.

As a rule, the boys fell into the girls' ways, and, noting how the current ran, encouraged this line of conduct. There was among the young people a good deal of flirtation — a kind of aimless play both of talk and manner that hung around the borders of the sentimental, and often got a good way beyond it. The boy who avoided this sort of thing was said to be bashful, and afraid of the girls.

That might be a sufficient explanation in some cases, but in others the trouble was not a dislike of girls, but some doubts as to this kind of girls.

Most boys were not as sentimental as were most girls. The boys were more workaday and practical. Their life, in the matter of getting a living, had more responsibility than the girls'. At the same time, the boy often gained a coarseness of thought and feeling in his companionship with the men and boys with whom he was thrown that the girl was almost altogether free from.

It was a curious idea of manliness some of the boys had. They tried to express a grown-up competence to take care of themselves by a rough manner and rude speech, and ability to enter into the spirit of the worst kind of conversation and stories, not only without a blush, but with sympathetic guffaws of laughter. They resented their parents' authority; they liked to resort to the loafing places when they had leisure. They aspired to smoke and chew and spit, like the rest of the loafers there. This may be an extreme picture, but there were a vast number of boys it would fit to a degree. Most country boys admired the gentility of smoking, and would be at great pains to acquire the habit after they got to be fifteen or sixteen years old. Perhaps the average boy never became a frequent smoker, but when he started off for a ride, he liked the pleasurable feeling of independence it gave him, to have

a cigar tilted neatly upward from the corner of his mouth. This stamped him a gentleman to all beholders, and the lookers-on were convinced from his manner and cigar that

Afternoon on the front porch

he was a person of vigorous and stoutly held opinions with which it would be best not to attempt any fooling.

When you saw a young man gayly riding by, sitting up very straight, with his best clothes on and his five-cent

cigar scenting the air with its gentle aroma, you might know he was going to take his girl to ride. If he could by any manner of means find the money at this time of his career, the young man bought a fast horse and a shiny top buggy. He fairly dazzled the beholders' eyes as he flitted swiftly past. Sometimes it took more than one horse to finish his courting, for the first one might die of old age before he got through. But whatever disappointments the young man suffered in his love affairs, and however his fancy or chance made him change one girl for another, you could not see, when he started on his journeys, that he had ever lost aught of that first freshness of demeanor which characterized him, and the perfume of his cigar had the same old five-cent fragrance.

After all, those young fellows who went skirmishing around in this fashion were mostly hearty and good-natured. When such a one married, his horse went slower, the polish wore off from his carriage, he neglected his cigar, and he and his wife settled down, as a rule, into a very staid and comfortable sort of folks. They might have been wiser, they might have gotten more from life; so could we all of us.

Shakespere says that "All the world loves a lover," and people are fond of repeating this saying; but Shakespere wrote three hundred years ago. I am very sure that New England people do not love a lover. He is a

butt for more poor jokes than any other character. The people our boy knew thought the lover was ridiculous. They called him off and set him on, and scared him and encouraged him, and mixed him up generally. They at least made that other saying come true — "Faint heart ne'er won fair lady." As for the girl concerned, she got among her friends a rather gentler and more coddling treatment.

Even the smallest children in some families had to endure a lot of talk from their elders about their "girls" and "fellows" that was the most sickly sort of sentimentality. If let alone, the children's minds did not run much on these lines, though they occasionally, in their innocent way, built some very pretty castles in the air, that soon melted away harmlessly into nothing in the warmth of their other interests.

Boys, when they began to go to the larger schools of a town, were apt to learn a variety of rough tricks, exclamations, and slang that shocked the folks at home when they got to showing off within their elders' sight and hearing. With the best of the boys this roughness presently wore off. Others cultivated their accomplishments, and even made their conversation emphatic with certain of the swear words. Such boys were condemned by the righteous of the community as altogether bad, and yet it sometimes happened that even they had redeeming

traits. I do not think lying was a common fault of the country boys, though most of them found themselves at times in circumstances which made it difficult to abstain from giving the truth a pretty severe straining; and perhaps most had two or three lies on their consciences that were undoubtedly black. But the boy probably repented these in shame and sorrow, and hoped he never would be tempted again to tell one of the untruths he so despised. Really bad and unblushing lying a boy was apt to learn, if ever, after he got among the older and rougher boys who hung around the post-office every evening at mail-time, or who attended the centre schools of the town.

Kitchen work

The farm, more than most places, tends to give children habits of thrift and singleness of purpose in the pursuit of education. There is seclusion enough on the majority of farms, so that the children are not confused by a multiplicity of amusements and too much going on. This seclusion may make some dull, but to others it gives a concentrated energy that results in their being all through life untiring workers and stout thinkers. Often from such a start they become the world's leaders in many widely scattered fields of usefulness. Because you are a farm-boy, it is not, however, certain that you have only to seek the city to win fame and fortune. The city is already crowded with workers and with ability. It is a lonely, homesick place, and many years must pass before a person can win even a position of safety and comfort. The boys with good habits and health and a strong will have the best chance. The boy with loose habits and lack of energy finds more temptations to a weak and purposeless career than in the country. Some boys and girls can live lives of wider usefulness in the large towns than in the country, and it is best for them to go there; but it is a serious question for most whether they will gain anything by the change.

It was my plan, in this book, to take the farmer's boy straight through the year. There still remains a final month that has not been treated. With Thanksgiving autumn

ended and winter began. The trees had been bare for some time, the grasses withered brown, and the landscape was

Encouraging the Thanksgiving turkey

white with frost every morning. There had been high winds whistling about the farm buildings and scurrying through the leaf litter of the fields. Snow squalls had whitened the air, and the roadway pools had frequently been glazed with ice. But the solid freezing and snows of winter were not looked for until after Thanksgiving. The boy got out his old mittens, and his cloth cap that he could pull down over his ears, and he kept his coat collar turned up, and hugged himself and drew his body into a narrower compass as he did his outdoor work. On some cold morning he brought forth his sled, and if he found a bank

steep enough he slid down on the frost very well. He tried such ice as was handy, and of course broke through and got his feet muddy.

Then real winter came, and the world was all white, and sleighbells jingled along the road, and the ponds and rivers were bridged with solid ice. The boy, with some

Going up for a slide

other boys, and perhaps some of the girls, too, was often out with his sled. They did a good deal of sliding down the steepest kind of hills — indeed, that was the sort they searched out; and if a hill had a few lively humps in it, so much the better. They dashed down the decline in the most reckless fashion; and then kept going up a little higher to make the descent still faster and more exciting. One little fellow, who lay flat on his sled and steered with

his toes, got slewed out of the track and went rolling over and over with his sled in a cloud of flying snow. You would think it would be the end of him. He got up dazed, and powdered white from head to foot, and his lip quivered, and some tears trickled from his eyes. In a shaky voice he said that he was going home. The other boys gathered round and brushed him off, and Willie Hooper lent him his handkerchief, when the boy couldn't find his own; and they told him how he looked going over

A sled ride for the little sister

and over, and what he ought to have done; and that he was all right, and to "come on, now; there ain't no use of goin' indoors just for that; we'll have a lot of fun yet."

The boy at length was comforted, and in a few minutes he was careering down the hill with the others, as lively as ever.

By the time a lad got to be six or seven years old he expected to find a pair of skates in his Christmas stocking. For some time after that his head accumulated bumps of a kind that would be apt to puzzle a phrenologist. It was astonishing in what a sudden and unexpected manner the skates would slip from under him! There was not even a chance for him to throw out his hands to save himself. He was in luck if he could manage to sit down instead of going full length. His ankles wobbled unaccountably, and the moment he left off mincing along in a sort of awkward, short-stepped walk and tried to strike out, down he went. Besides, his skate-straps were always loosening, or getting under his skates and tripping him up, and his feet became cold and his mittens got wet. But the boy kept at it with a perseverance under difficulty and disaster that would have accomplished wonders if applied to work. In time he could skim around with any of them, and play shinny and skate backward and in a circle, and cut a figure 8 in the ice, and *almost* do a number of other remarkable things.

The boy who skated much had to experience a few breakings through the ice. On the little ponds and near the shore this was often fun, and the boy who dared go nearest

The experts

to the weak places and slid longest on a bender was a hero in his mates' estimation, and, I might add, in his own. When he did break in he very likely got only his feet wet, and he did not mind that very much; but when he broke through in some deep place, and did not grip the ice until he was in up to his arms, it was no smiling matter. He usually scrambled out quickly enough, but the worst of it came in getting home in his freezing clothing, that conducted the chill of the frosty air clear to his bones. Yet it rarely happened that anything serious resulted from these accidents.

The year went out with Christmas, the holiday that

perhaps shone brightest of all the list in the boy's mind. A few days before its advent he and his folks visited the town, where all the stores were, to buy presents. They did much mysterious advising together, but never as a family group; there always was at least one shut out. It took a great deal of consideration and calculation to make forty-nine cents go around among all your friends. But the members of the family were usually considerate, and when the boy fished for hints of their likes, they made it clear, in suggesting the thing they most wanted, that he would not have to spend such a great deal. Then, while he was in the store buying, the others who happened to be with him were always good enough to stand by the door and look the other way, so that, of course, their presents, when they received them, were a great surprise.

Each of the children brought home various little packages, which they were at great pains to hide away from the other members of the household, though they could not forbear to talk about them darkly, and get the others to guess, until they were almost telling themselves. Some of them, particularly the girls, were apt to be "making things" about this time, and you had to be careful how you noticed what was left lying around, or you discovered secrets, and there was likely to be a sudden hustling of things out of sight when you came into the room, and looks of such exaggerated innocence that you knew something

Getting ready for skating

was going on. If you showed an inclination to stop, your sister said, "Frank, do go along!"

"What for?" asked Frank.

"Oh, you've been in the house long enough!" was the reply.

"Well, I guess I want to get warm," Frank continued. "It's pretty cold outdoors. Say, what is it you're sitting on, Nell, anyway?"

"I didn't say I was sitting on anything," was Nellie's response. "You just go along out, or you sha'n't have it."

Then Frank blew his nose and laughed, and pulled on his mittens and shuffled off.

On Christmas eve the children hung up their stockings back of the stove, and were hopeful of presents, in spite of the disbelief they expressed in the possibility that Santa Claus could come down the stovepipe. Sure enough, in the morning the stockings were all bunchy with the things in them, and the children had a great celebration pulling them out and getting the wraps off the packages. They did all this without stopping to more than half dress, and breakfast had to wait for them. They were in no haste, for they had popcorn and candy that they found in their stockings to munch on, and every one had to show all his things to each of the rest, and see all the others had, and spring the baby's Jack-in-the-box about half a dozen times till they got used to the fright of it.

They had better things to eat that day than usual, and more of them, and with the food and the sweetmeats and extras some of the children were nearly sick and wholly quarrelsome before the day was done.

A Christmas puzzle

In the evening there was, perhaps, a Christmas tree at the schoolhouse. There had been a turmoil of preparation in the neighborhood for several days previous; for the children had to be set learning pieces, and practising, and fixing up costumes; and cake and cookies and all the good things to eat had to be made ready, and some one had to collect the dimes and nickels and quarters to get candy and oranges and Christmas-tree trimmings with.

Then some two or three had to make a journey to the woods and chop a good branchy hemlock or spruce of the right size, and set it up in the corner of the schoolhouse. Finally, the green curtains had to be hung to separate the audience from the stage, where the small people would do their acting and speak their pieces.

The whole village turned out in the evening. They came on foot and they came in teams. Usually, each group carried a lantern to light its way, and the lanterns were left in the entry when their bearers went in. The schoolhouse windows were aglow with light, and things within fairly glittered to the children's eyes. There were six lamps along the walls, in addition to those back of the curtains, and all the lamps were lighted and turned up nearly to the smoking point. Everybody was there, besides four boys from the next village, who sat on a front seat, and James Peterson's dog. Some of the big people got into some of the small seats, and certain of the neighbors who didn't get along very well with certain others had to manage carefully not to run across each other's courses. Chairs had been brought from the near homes and set in the aisles and wherever else there was space for them at the back of the room. There were none too many, and the schoolroom was such a pocket of a place that by the time the last comers arrived even elbow-room was scarce. The air was full of the hum of talk, and the young people were

running all about the open space and in and out the door, and there were consultations and gigglings and flurries over things forgotten or lost or something else, without number.

The curtain was drawn, but you could see the top of the gayly loaded tree over it, and the movement of feet under it, and you could see queer shadows on it of figures doing mysterious things. Sometimes a figure brushed against the curtain, and it came bulging away out into the room, and the four boys from the next town had the greatest work to keep from exploding over the funniness of this; and, as it was, one of them tumbled off from the narrow seat he occupied.

By and by there was a quieting in the flurry up in front, and some one stood before the curtain with a paper in his hand and announced that the first exercise of the evening would be thus-and-so. There was no astonishing genius shown in what followed, but a person would have to be very dyspeptic not to enjoy the simplicity and earnestness of it all. Each child had his or her individual way, and some of the participants were so small they could only pipe and lisp the words, and you didn't know what they said; but when they made their little bows and hurried off to find their mothers, you and the rest of the audience were delighted, and applauded just the same. There was a melodeon at one side of the room, and the

Christmas morning

school sang several songs, and one of the young ladies sang a solo all alone, and they had a dialogue with Santa Claus in it, who was so dressed up in a long beard and a fur coat and a deep voice that you wouldn't have any idea it was only Hiram Taylor!

At length came the Christmas tree. How handsome it looked, with the numerous packages and bright things hung among its green twigs, and the strings of popcorn looped all about, and the oranges and candy bags dangling everywhere! Three or four of the young people took off the presents and called out names, and kept everybody growing happier and happier. When the tree was bare, and even the popcorn and candy bags and oranges had been distributed, some of the women folks got lively in a corner where there was a table piled all over with baskets and boxes. Then plates began to circulate, and it was found that there was a pot boiling on the stove and a smell of coffee in the air. About nineteen different kinds of cake started on their wanderings, and there were biscuits and nuts; and you had a chance to talk with everybody and show your presents, and altogether had so good a time that you felt as if the pleasure would last the whole year through.

It would take many books to tell all there is to tell about the farmer's boy; and where can we better leave him than this Christmas night, with the rest of the family, snugged

up among the robes of the sleigh, on the way home? The lantern on the dashboard flashes its light along the road ahead, the horses' hoofs strike crisply on the frozen snow, the bells jingle, and the sky overhead glitters full of radiant stars. In the gliding sleigh are the children, holding their precious presents in their laps, and still in animated conversation reviewing the events of the evening. The sleigh moves on, they are lost to sight — the book is ended.

A picture book